THROUGH ETERNAL SPIRIT

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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JESUS AND LIFE

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# THROUGH ETERNAL SPIRIT



## A STUDY OF HEBREWS, JAMES, AND 1 PETER

BY

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TO

MY FATHER

*Printed in Great Britain*

# PREFACE

THE Epistle to the Hebrews, a study of which occupies the major portion of this volume, does not very readily lend itself to such a treatment as the Humanism Series contemplates. I have however tried to keep in view the aim of the series as I understand it, viz. to show the significance of the books of the Bible for our age, but to do this only on the basis of a study of the prior question : What did they mean for their authors and their first readers ?

My regret at the delay in the appearance of this volume is tempered by the consideration that it has enabled me to benefit by the valuable work done on " Hebrews " by Professors Moffatt and E. F. Scott, to both of whom I am deeply indebted. Other works my debt to which requires an acknowledgment are included in the books mentioned in the Bibliography.

My grateful thanks are due to my wife and to my brother, Dr. John E. McFadyen, for reading the proof sheets.

J. F. McFADYEN.

KINGSTON, ONTARIO.
*December* 3, 1924.

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# THROUGH ETERNAL SPIRIT

## THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### CHAPTER I

### AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR

In the King James' version the title of this book, retained in the Revised Version, is "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews." In this title four statements are made or implied : (1) that the book is an epistle ; (2) that the author is an apostle ; (3) in particular, the apostle Paul ; (4) that it was addressed to "Hebrews," that is, to Christians of Jewish origin. All of these statements have been seriously challenged, and at least three of them are almost certainly wrong.

(1) We now know from the papyri that the New Testament epistles follow the regular letter forms of the time. The introduction regularly contains three items : the name of the sender of the letter, the name or designation of the addressee, and a greeting. None of the three appears at the beginning of "To the Hebrews," and it is the absence of the first two that has given rise to some of the unsolved and perhaps insoluble problems of the

book. Not only is the epistolary introduction absent, but we are approaching the closing verses before we find an indication that we are dealing with a letter.

On the other hand, there are features that suggest that the contents of the book, or some of them, were intended for oral delivery. It may be that such phrases as " What more am I to say ? For time will fail me . . ." do not certainly point to the speaker rather than the writer. But justice is done to the magnificent opening verses only when they are read aloud ; and whatever the purpose of the work as a whole, the author of the eleventh chapter was a born orator. The question is only one of emphasis. Paul's epistles, though genuine epistles, were, and presumably were meant to be, repeatedly read aloud. Even if " Hebrews " was intended to make its impression through the ear rather than the eye, we can hardly imagine that a sermon constructed with such care and skill was meant to fulfil its mission in a single delivery. Perhaps we might characterise the book as a preacher's manifesto with a covering letter attached.

(2) Whether we understand the word " apostle " in its narrower sense as applied to one of the twelve, or in the broader signification in which it included others, such as James the Lord's brother and Barnabas, there is no indication that the author was an apostle. He not merely makes no claim to apostolic dignity, but seems to be unconscious of

the existence of the office. The only person to whom he applies the title is Jesus (iii. 1). He writes as a teacher, perhaps as a "leader," to use his own word; but nowhere does he claim authority beyond that which is the prerogative of any spiritual adviser.

(3) Even if the book were written by an apostle, it seems certain that that apostle was not Paul. On the subject of the authorship we have no definite knowledge, beyond what we can get from a study of the epistle. We hear of it first before the end of the first century; yet the Pauline authorship was not generally accepted till the fourth century. In Alexandria from about the end of the second century, possibly long before that, there was a tradition that Paul was the author; but Clement and Origen evidently felt that the evidence was not very convincing, and for generations the tradition did not universally commend itself even in Alexandria. That such a theory should arise was only natural: partly because Paul was "the letter-writer" of the early Christian Church, as Solomon was "the wise man" and David "the psalmist" of the Jewish Church; partly because ascription to Paul would greatly strengthen the claim to a place in the Canon of a work which all intelligent Christians would wish to see in the Canon.

In favour of Pauline authorship there is very little to be said. The place which this writer gives

to Jesus is as lofty as that which Paul gives Him in his latest writings. Some of the phrases and of the more striking minor ideas can be paralleled in Paul's epistles. Yet the parallels adduced, such as the need of a higher wisdom for mature Christians than for recent converts, and the distinction between (metaphorical) milk diet and solid food (Heb. v. 12, 14; 1 Cor. ii. 6, iii. 2) prove community of intellectual atmosphere rather than dependence of one writer on the other. Even a parallel that seems more than a coincidence, such as the idea that kindness shown to a Christian, especially to a Christian teacher, is a sacrifice well-pleasing to God (Phil. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 16) may be explained otherwise than by mutual contact. It may be that the author of "Hebrews" had read some of Paul's epistles, especially "Romans." Beyond that it does not seem safe to go.

Some arguments against the Pauline authorship have been given undue weight. Even if we do not find the high-priesthood of Jesus in Paul's epistles, that in itself would not prove that "Hebrews" was not from his pen. In "Romans" Paul can say: "Who is there to condemn us? It is Christ Jesus who died, rather has been raised from the dead, who is at God's right hand, who indeed intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ (or God)?" (viii. 33 ff.) a passage which shows that some of the leading

ideas of "Hebrews" were not remote from the thought of Paul.

Again, the implication in ii. 3 that the writer and his readers had not themselves heard Jesus, but had received the Gospel at second hand from ear-witnesses of the Lord, has usually been regarded as strong evidence against Pauline authorship, since in "Galatians" (i. and ii.) Paul so strenuously maintains his independence of apostolic teaching. But whatever Paul may mean in "Galatians," it is generally believed that he had neither seen nor heard Jesus, and that he must therefore have got from others his knowledge of Jesus; which is exactly what this writer says of himself and his friends. Paul's point in "Galatians" seems to be precisely the point which some of his interpreters are so strongly emphasising to-day, that his theology and Christology were not derived from the apostles but were original; or, as Paul would have put it, he got them by divine inspiration. The Gospel in the sense of traditions of Jesus and His teaching Paul perhaps tended to undervalue; but for what knowledge he had of this subject he was obviously indebted to Christians, apostles or others, and in more than one case he frankly acknowledges his debt to tradition (1 Cor. xi. 23; xv. 3).

Yet the proof that Paul was not the author, a proof derived from various converging lines of evidence, is almost complete. The writer is master

of a Greek style which gives this book a unique place in New Testament literature. The tell-tale particles and introductory phrases, alike those used and those omitted, suggest an author other than Paul. As a term for Christians "the saints" is used somewhat more sparingly than in Paul's writings. Much more noticeable is the difference in the expressions used for Jesus. Of the phrases "Christ Jesus" and "Jesus Christ" so constantly used by Paul, the latter is seldom found in "Hebrews," the former not at all, though the author repeatedly speaks of "Christ," and his use of the personal name "Jesus" is one of the marked characteristics of the book. Only once or twice does he apply the term "Lord" to Jesus. Nor does he introduce Scripture quotations as Paul does. Paul quotes the human author, or says "it is written" or "Scripture says." This writer introduces Old Testament quotations with the formula: "The Holy Spirit says" or "God says."

But the careful reader, even of the English versions, can see that the author was a man of a different type from Paul. The book is anonymous, which Paul's writings were not. The thoughts of Paul's fiery spirit sometimes outran the capacity of his pen, or of the pen of his amanuensis, to keep pace with them. He left sentences unfinished, and sometimes allowed his argument to stray down some attractive side-path. The author of "Hebrews" is always master of himself; his

thoughts proceed with the stately march of a well-ordered procession. The end of his argument, and every stage of it, are in view from the beginning. By throwing out previous hints he prepares the way for discussions before he reaches them. For example, the double reference to Jesus as high-priest in ii. 17 and iii. 1 forms an introduction to the detailed exposition of the subject that begins in iv. 14, and this is typical of his procedure. We can imagine too that in the heat of the moment Paul wrote things he would afterwards have erased. The calm deliberation of the writer "to the Hebrews" left no room for after-thoughts.

It is easy to exaggerate the importance of the fact that when Paul spoke of the Law he was thinking chiefly of the moral law (though he does not formally distinguish between ritual and moral), and that this writer thinks rather of ritual law. If this were the only difficulty it might be explained by the supposition that Paul was filling a gap left by his own previous treatment of the Law. In view, however, of all the facts, it is much more likely that another writer was supplementing Paul's eager, sometimes almost baffled attempts to explain the relation of the Christian to the Law. To this writer religion is not a law to be obeyed, but a worship to lead men to God.

To both writers the Law is "weak." Paul regards it as weak because of the frailty of our "flesh," because we are so constituted that what

the Law demands we can never give. To this writer the Law is weak in itself. The ritual law on which he concentrates his attention belongs to the world of unsubstantial shadows ; it is at best a parable of the realities to come with Jesus. He does not take Paul's despairing view of the fatal propensity of the "flesh" to lead men astray. He shares, however, with Paul the characteristic that he does less than justice to the real value of that aspect of the Law which is for him, for the time at least, the whole Law.

Just as Paul sometimes ignored the abiding worth of the moral Law as keeping before the Jews lofty standards of life and creed, forgot the deep and enthusiastic emotion which the contemplation of the Law awoke in many a pious Jew, so this writer neglects the social value of a ritual which taught men their common needs ; nor does he take account of the worth of the emotion which the picturesque ceremonies of the Day of Atonement must have aroused in the minds of thoughtful worshippers, as they were annually reminded that in spite of their sins the covenant God was still their God. Neither Paul nor the writer "to the Hebrews" was a one-sided controversialist ; but with the preacher's instinct they placed the emphasis where for their readers it most needed to be placed.

Paul contrasted "faith" and "works." This writer also speaks of "dead works" (vi. 1 ; ix. 14),

by which, however, he does not mean moral achievements by which we acquire merit. Rather to him all conduct not inspired by Jesus is "dead," as being out of vital connection with the God whom he loves to call the "living God." "Faith" again is one of this author's favourite categories, but he does not mean by it what Paul means. Paul's "faith" is a personal trust in Jesus. To the author of "Hebrews" it is the faculty by which we "sense" the unseen, feel certain of the future, and in general realise the abiding realities.

Whether Paul was a mystic or not, at least he used language that could be construed in a mystical sense; witness his frequent references to being "in Christ." Such a phrase this writer could not have used. To him Jesus is the captain, the pioneer, the leader who goes on before and says to us "Follow me," as He so often said to willing or hesitating disciples in the days of His flesh (ii. 10; xii. 2; xiii. 13). Again, in Paul the resurrection of Jesus is central. This writer mentions it only once (xiii. 20), in a revised quotation from Isaiah. For this, no doubt, there is an excellent reason. The spirit that inspired Jesus all through His ministry, not least in His death, was the spirit of the eternal. There was no room in this writer's thought for that break between the earthly life and the session at the right hand of God, which the resurrection has usually been understood to imply. At the moment of Jesus'

death the veil was rent in twain. There does seem to be at this point a real difference, at least in form, between the thought of this epistle and Paul's.

If Paul did not write the letter, who did? Wellhausen remarked about Genesis xiv, the Melchizedec chapter, that it is, like Melchizedec, "without father, without mother, without pedigree." The same remark might be made about the epistle "To the Hebrews." It is not merely that the book is anonymous: anonymity is a characteristic of a large proportion of the writings both of the Old Testament and the New; but not the least impressive feature in this piece of lofty eloquence and suggestive Christian thinking is the almost complete absence of autobiographical references, direct or indirect. Egotism, of which Paul has been accused, is surely the last charge one would bring against this writer. His metaphors, by which a writer sometimes gives a clue to his environment or his experiences, are singularly unrevealing. Even his sea metaphors, such as "drift away" (ii. 1), and "anchor of the soul" (vi. 19) are of a kind which, in the countries round the Mediterranean, would be as familiar to those who stayed ashore as to those who made frequent voyages.

All the names that have been proposed are obvious guesses, the modern suggestions frankly so. Luther's revival of the theory of Apollos as

author has attracted widespread attention ; and Harnack's suggestion that Priscilla wrote the book in conjunction with Aquila is of great interest. In both instances the New Testament accounts of these people explain the attractiveness of the suggestions ; while in the case of Priscilla there is the further claim that Paul's antipathy to the prominence of women in the Church accounts for the veil of obscurity thrown over the authorship. All we can say is, that on the unwarranted assumption that the epistle was written by someone known to us from the pages of the New Testament, some one of these guesses may be correct. Our ignorance of the history of the scattered Christian Churches in the later decades of the first Christian century greatly increases the probability that the writer is not otherwise known to us.

## CHAPTER II

## TO UNKNOWN READERS

(4) If the traditional ascription of the authorship to Paul, accepted by the standard English versions, was only a conjecture, this seems to be true also of the other tradition, that the recipients of the letter were "Hebrews" or Jewish Christians. It was natural to suppose that a document which "proved" all its points by reference to Old Testament texts, and found in Jewish ritual a parable and foreshadowing of the Christian Gospel, a document moreover which ignores all religions except the Jewish and the Christian, was meant for men of Jewish antecedents. Yet in recent years the difficulties of this apparently obvious theory have been felt increasingly. We now know that the use the book makes of the Old Testament gives no certain inference as to the pre-conversion status of the readers. Even if we did not know that Gentile Christians could argue in this way from the Old Testament, modern missionary experience makes it abundantly clear that converts from the world religions, to whom but a little while previously the Old Testament was hardly even

a name, readily learn to regard it as one of their sacred books, and to give to it a reverence at least as great as that which they had for the scriptures of their former religion.

Moreover, if the readers were Jewish Christians tempted to fall back into Judaism, we should expect the author to try to strengthen their faith that Jesus was the Christ ; but from the beginning he simply assumes this. We should expect him to try to revive their belief that Jesus had risen ; but this is common ground between him and them. His theme all through is the eternal, heavenly Christ, but his only actual reference to the resurrection of Jesus is made in a single phrase (xiii. 20). If he feared for his readers the attraction of Jewish ritual, his polemic would surely have had reference to the ritual of his own day ; but there is no indication in the book that either writer or readers knew anything of contemporary Jewish religious ceremonies. The ritual of which he speaks is that of the ancient tabernacle of the wilderness days. His knowledge of it is gathered entirely from a study of the Old Testament and from tradition. The temple is never mentioned, and is so far without the author's ken that we cannot even make out whether it was still standing in his day.

On the assumption that there was among the readers a Jewish propaganda such as Paul had to face, we should expect references to such questions as circumcision and the distinction between "clean "

and "unclean" foods. Of these there is no mention, nor is there any discussion of the relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Judging from the complete silence of the writer, the Jewish-Gentile controversy, if it had ever taken place in this Church, was dead and perhaps forgotten.

If the facts do not bear out the theory that the recipients of the epistle were Jewish Christians with leanings towards a reversion to Judaism, as little do they bear out the theory that they were Gentile Christians tempted to fall back into paganism. In that case the writer would surely have felt impelled to lay again a foundation of elementary Christian truth. This, however, he deliberately refuses to do (vi. 1). From the beginning to the end of the epistle the whole Gentile world is almost completely ignored. There is nothing even remotely approaching the first chapter of "Romans," for example. Indeed, one of the problems of the epistle is just the difficulty of conjecturing in what Christian Church in the latter part of the first Christian century there could be a great Christian teacher who was hardly conscious that a world existed outside both of Judaism and of Christianity.

That he nowhere suggests the duty of evangelising the non-Christian world is no more strange in his letter than it is in the letters of Paul. It may well be however that his apparent indifference to the entire Gentile world is only apparent and is really an example of self-restraint. The pagan

world, especially the Roman government, was already taking on the character of the anti-Christ. In his references to the persecutions of the Christians, past and future, there is not one bitter word. How dark and deep the feelings of persecuted Christians could be we learn from the book of "Revelation." That this writer and his readers were under a temptation, the same in kind if less in degree, gives all the more significance to his silence.

Much misunderstanding of the epistle has been due to the assumption that it is a polemic, that each position of the author is asserted in opposition to a contrary tendency among the readers. We have already seen that this is not so with regard to the main points of the argument. There can have been no temptation among the readers to revive the long obsolete tabernacle ritual. The teaching on the high-priesthood of Jesus is not given to correct misapprehension. It is, as he himself describes it (v. 11ff.), higher instruction in Christian truth, into which he hopes, almost against hope, that they are fit to be initiated. This teaching he gives as an intellectual and spiritual stimulus.

The readers, we gather, were becoming disheartened, falling into a state of religious lethargy. Towards that result apparently several causes had contributed. They had borne suffering manfully, but had become weary of it; the expected return of Jesus had not taken place, but things went on

as before ; their profession of Christianity led to social ostracism and contempt, and they had begun to wonder whether it was all worth while. There may also have been temptation to conform to Jewish practices, or to the ceremonial of the "Mystery" religions, or to both. They were becoming weak-kneed and limp (xii. 12) and needed bracing up.

The tonic this writer supplies is a piece of hard Christian thinking. He believes that a fuller understanding of the Christian message will strengthen their moral fibre and deepen their spiritual life. Heinrici's suggestion that the epistle was written especially for a group of evangelists or teachers does not seem to have met with general acceptance. The theory has been supported on such grounds as that in v. 12 the writer says his readers ought to be teachers ; that the argument is too difficult to be meant for ordinary readers ; and that warnings against sensual sin, such as we find in Paul's epistles, are conspicuous by their absence.

This is not very convincing. In v. 12 what the writer says is, that on account of the time that has elapsed since their conversion (and apparently for no other reason) they ought themselves to be teachers ; on the contrary, they still need elementary instruction. The argument in parts is difficult ; but is it any more difficult than many sections of Paul's epistles ? One of the wonders of the New

Testament is that plain men and women were apparently expected to understand these epistles when read aloud in public. No doubt much must be allowed for intellectual environment. A teacher reading Wordsworth with a class of schoolboys in the West would be at pains to explain the nature of pantheistic belief. With a class of Indian boys such explanations would be uncalled for ; pantheistic ideas are of the air they breathe. Even allowing for this consideration, the epistles are often difficult reading. Moreover, the writer does warn against sensual sin (xii. 16 ; xiii. 4). The readers are invited too to admonish each other (x. 24f.), not to admonish their pupils as one might have expected had they been teachers.

There seems to be some ground for believing that the people addressed were not the whole Christian population of a city, but a smaller and more homogeneous body, perhaps a single " house Church " in some city where there were various such Churches. At all events the writer can speak as if his readers had had various experiences in common. The founders of the Church had been men who themselves had heard Jesus (ii. 3) ; not long after their conversion, since when considerable time had elapsed, the readers had manfully endured persecution (x. 32ff.). They were becoming discouraged, however, with their continual sufferings (xii. 3ff.) and so were ceasing to attend the Christian meetings (x. 25).

Perhaps the strongest argument for the "single congregation" theory is in the last chapter, where in verse 17 the readers are told to "obey your leaders and submit to them," while in verse 24 the admonition is to "greet all your leaders and all the saints," which might very well mean "all the Church leaders and Church members in the city as well as those in your own congregation." The inference however cannot be drawn with any certainty, and the homogeneity presupposed among the readers has been somewhat exaggerated. More than once he allows for the possibility that some of them will stand fast while others yield (iii. 12 ; iv. 1).

The ambiguous greeting in xiii. 24 from "the Italians," if this phrase means "the exiled Italians who are with me," taken in conjunction with the fact that the first extant reference to the epistle is in the Roman Clement, strengthens the supposition, to which internal evidence lends some countenance, that the readers were a house Church in Rome.

While "To the Hebrews" is an original work, hardly any book of the New Testament suffers more when it is dissociated from its literary relatives. The commentaries have shown with great fullness the affinities of the language and ideas of this writing with those, for example, of the Wisdom Literature and of Philo. To take only one or two illustrations, Philo had already identified Melchizedec with the Logos, and he speaks of the Logos as interceding with God. The interpretation of

the names Melchizedec and Salem (vii. 2) is found both in Josephus and in Philo. Philo, like this writer, had been puzzled by the idea of God swearing by Himself, as in Gen. xxii. 16 ; but unlike this writer he concluded that the expression was an anthropomorphism.

As for the date, in " The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," written about the middle of the last decade of the first Christian century, we find the words " who, being the brightness of his majesty, is by so much greater than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name " (xxxvi.); and in the same chapter " who maketh his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire." These quotations are only two out of many that make it practically certain that Clement had read " To the Hebrews " and suggest that the epistle had been in circulation for some time. Apart from that, all estimates of the date of the epistle are conjectural. The Church had been founded by ear-witnesses of Jesus, but that might have happened at any time after Pentecost. Even if we could be sure that the Timothy mentioned in xiii. 23 was the friend of Paul, that gives us no new clue to the date. Perhaps the general impression we get from the book and its vague historical references, combined with its use by " First Clement," suggests some date early in the last quarter of the first century.

## CHAPTER III

## LIVING ISSUES

This epistle, in the nature of the case, can hardly be generally popular. There are a few passages like the introductory sentences with their rolling eloquence and the dazzling splendour of their thought, the concluding verses of chapter iv. that tell timid and tempted sufferers of their sympathetic high priest, and the song of the Immortals in chapter xi., which the Church counts among her most cherished treasures. The same can hardly be said of the epistle as a whole, in spite of the extent to which its leading ideas have influenced alike the prayers and the praises of the Church. The difficulty of the argument, the remoteness of the thought-images, especially those connected with the tabernacle ritual, and the unconvincing Biblical exegesis which the writer inherits from the Alexandrians, are all stumbling-blocks in the way of the modern reader.

Perhaps the chief obstacle to a wider use of the epistle is our difficulty in seeing what the writer is aiming at, or what, when we have read to the end, he has accomplished. It is not only that the

imagery he uses is foreign to us ; he seems to move in a world quite unlike our own. Only occasionally do the orbits of his thought and of ours intersect ; though when that does happen, as in the passages we have mentioned, we feel we are in the presence of a master Christian mind.

It is very unfortunate that the form into which the author has cast his thought has tended to estrange him from us. The questions with which he deals are the very questions that thrust themselves so insistently on our own generation ; and while the answers that we give differ in form from his answers, he has at least shown us with great effectiveness the truths that have to be conserved if the Christian religion is to be the saving power of God. The Church, when it takes its missionary task as seriously as does the Church of our age, is compelled to face the question : In what spirit is the Church to approach the non-Christian world ? Until comparatively recently there was a tendency, perhaps exaggerated in retrospect, to denounce the non-Christian religions as things of evil, and to ask the convert to begin his public career as a Christian by renouncing them. To-day it is perhaps more common to emphasise that God has never in any part of His world left Himself without a witness ; to believe that the world religions are stages, more backward or more advanced, in the human search for God, or rather in the Divine search for man ; and that Christianity is not so

much the supplanter of the other religions as the reality of which they were the shadowy prophecies.

The best-known example of a systematic attempt to expound this point of view is that in which Dr. Farquhar tries to show that Christianity is the "Crown of Hinduism." That is precisely the attitude which the author of "To the Hebrews" takes up with regard to Judaism. He shares with the prophets and with the most uncompromising of modern missionaries the view that there is no efficacy in animal sacrifice, that it has no power to reach the conscience; yet to him the Levitical sacrificial ritual, especially the ritual of the Day of Atonement, is a parable and a prophecy of the work of Jesus in opening up men's way to God.

The readers of the epistle had not exactly given up their Christian faith; on the contrary, they had suffered much and given much in defence of it; but they had in large measure lost the enthusiasm of their first love. Is not that true of multitudes in our own day? The author's prescription for their case is twofold. On the one hand, he urges them to live up to the highest standard of Christian ethics: discipline, kindness, family purity, patient endurance of wrong, contentment; whatever else goes these must not go.

But along with this he asks them to think out afresh the whole question of the relation of Jesus to sin, to God, to themselves. We often account for the indifference of the average Church member

to the foreign enterprise of the Church, by saying : "If they only knew . . ." But the end of that sentence is not only the condition of a people whose life is uninspired by Jesus. If they only knew what Jesus has meant to their own people, considered what He has been and is ready to be to themselves, the new knowledge would reverberate through all their lives.

Books are written to-day on the finality of the Christian religion. The study especially of the non-Christian religions is supposed to have put Christianity on its defence in its claim that Jesus is the perfect and the final revelation of God. The proof of this same thesis is one of the chief aims of the epistle. It is true that it portrays Christianity against the background of only one aspect of Judaism, but its method is valid always. The writer shows that Jesus has actually done the one thing that men needed to have done, the thing that all religion professes to do. When men tell us of a new religion that will be some kind of amalgam of existing religions, we are entitled to ask them : In what way is God's revelation of Himself in Jesus defective ? What could a new revelation do for us that Jesus has not done ?

In their despondency and spiritual sluggishness the readers of this epistle were tempted to forsake the Christian gatherings, as multitudes in our day are neglecting them. The writer warns them of the danger. In religion as in all life, in worship

as in suffering, we need each other. If we have nothing to get, and only the blindest could say that, yet we have something to give.

In another aspect the epistle is in accord with the thought of our time. We like to think that we are no longer deceived by the outward show of things, by titles and uniforms and an air of antiquity ; that we value our officials for their work, not for their office ; our institutions for what they are, not for what they have been. In the very centre of the teaching of this epistle is the truth that the only real priest is the priest " after the order of Melchizedec," whose worth lies in himself, not in his ancestry nor in anything adventitious. This attitude dominates the entire epistle. The only Church dignitaries mentioned are called by the indefinite term " leaders " (xiii. 7, 17). No official name is ever used, and the word apostle seems to be almost deliberately avoided (ii. 3). There is no clear reference to baptism (not vi. 2, nor x. 32), nor to the Lord's Supper, nor to the Lord's day.

The absence of unambiguous mention of the sacraments is in part explained by the general trend of the epistle. Sacraments are parables ; the Judaic age of parable has now given place to the Christian age of realities. Yet the author's attitude to them is of a piece with his attitude to all things and people official. If the Christian gatherings of x. 25 are stated meetings for worship, we are left

to infer this. The high-priesthood of Jesus is so described that for one who has followed and accepted the argument, it is unthinkable that there can be a human priest in the Christian Church. "Leaders" there may be but no "priest" to stand between the worshipper and his God, or in any way profess to represent men before God.

The theological part of the epistle has perennial value because it is an interpretation of an essentially Christian experience. Using the categories of an ancient ritual, the author sets forth what Jesus had been to himself, and to the men who thought with him; essentially what Jesus has been to His followers in all ages. He and they had felt a barrier between themselves and God: that barrier they knew was their own sin. Jesus, one of ourselves, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, had lived a life of such moral perfection, beauty and power, that death, the sphere in which sin reigns, had no jurisdiction over Him. This Jesus, though our brother, is yet God manifest in the flesh. He has torn asunder the veil that hid God from human perception. He is our Captain, going on before, and where He leads He calls on us to follow. All who accept His leadership can now "draw near unto God." He Himself is the Way, the new and living Way to God.

Whatever we may think of his theory of the Atonement (though strictly speaking he has no theory of the Atonement; he takes for granted

the efficacy of sacrifice) this writer gets down to the roots of things when he tells us that we have not that purity without which we cannot see God, and that of ourselves we can never win that purity. Through what Jesus has done for us in His life, and especially in His death, we are delivered from fear and all that shackles us, given a new mastery over ourselves, a new confidence in the presence of God and a new sense of fellowship with Him.

In this epistle, as hardly anywhere else even in the New Testament, do we feel ourselves lifted above ourselves, out of the sphere of the sensuous, the petty, the passing, into the realm of the timeless, of the unseen things that abide. The trend of the writer's mind is shown by those ever-recurring words and phrases which, with different shades of meaning, point to the unshaken kingdom of eternal reality : the living Word, the living God, the living Way, God's promises, God's oath, perfection, the city with foundations, the new Jerusalem ; and the host of comparatives, in reality superlatives, that tell us a new and better era has dawned. The Christian religion is final in this sense, that what Jesus is no other can transcend, what He has done no other can do, and there is no need that it should ever be done again.

The writer answers too the question men sometimes ask : How can a Man, appearing in time, accomplish that which is valid for all time ? Can

we ever hope for a more effective answer than this epistle gives : that which Christ did, He did " in the spirit of the eternal " ? [1] (ix. 14). Jesus came to be and Jesus died ; but the Christ is timeless, the spirit of the Christ is wrought into the very fibre of the world ; the Christ is the radiance of God's glory, the impress of His substance ; in the Christ torn on the Cross we see, as nowhere else, the timeless sacrificial love of God for men. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus saw the heavens parted in twain (Mark i. 10). All through His ministry He had unbroken communion with God. When the struggle and the pain were over He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Because the heavens were opened for the Captain of our salvation they are open for us. " Let us then draw near with boldness to the throne of grace."

[1] Dr. Moffatt's translation.

## CHAPTER IV

## GOD SPEAKING THROUGH A SON
(i. 1–4)

In its lofty doctrine of Christ the carefully worded and deeply impressive prologue reminds us of the prologue to the fourth Gospel ; but more perhaps than in any other book of the New Testament do the introductory words challenge contrast with the opening message of the Bible. In the beginning, God : at the end of the age God has spoken in a Son. In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth : in this work of creation His agent was the Son. God made all things : He made the Son heir of all things. Through all the creation story God's glory shines : the Son is the radiance of that glory. "God said," and it was done : it is by "the word of His power" that the Son sustains all things. When the work of creation was finished sin entered in and separated man from God : at the end of the age the Son won for men purification from sins. In the beginning God appeared in lonely splendour : at the end the Son sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Already in the Introduction we find some of those features that strike us most in the epistle. The writer has as high a doctrine of the "person" of Christ as Paul or John, but he does not teach this doctrine ; he assumes it as common ground between him and his hearers. So prominent is the high-priesthood of Jesus in the epistle that we are tempted to think this was the category under which the author primarily thought of Jesus. The Introduction reminds us that he accepted the current Christology of the Church ; that to him high priest is not a substitute for but an addition to the titles the Church was heaping on Jesus ; that for him too Jesus was the Christ, the Lord, the unique son of God, the vicegerent of God, the living embodiment of the glory of God, whose earthly existence was but an episode in His life. If he does not call Jesus Saviour, yet as high priest He does the work of Saviour.

Here as throughout the book some of the phrases used are borrowed. Certain of the expressions which in this passage refer to Jesus (who is not here named) had already been applied to the Logos or to (personified) Wisdom. Thus in the book of "Wisdom" Wisdom is called a "reflection of eternal light." Yet as employed by the writer "to the Hebrews" they are not stock phrases, used conventionally or as a concession to orthodoxy. They are of the substance of his thought and of his argument. If we would understand the book

as a whole it is even more necessary than in the case of the fourth Gospel to read it in the light of the prologue.

In the very first line the author makes clear his attitude to the Old Testament. Jesus had challenged the permanent validity of certain sections of the Old Testament ritual, and the sufficiency as a moral guide of the ethical precepts of the Law. Later the far more fundamental question was to be raised, whether the God of the Old Testament is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this writer the question does not even occur ; nor does he contemplate that such questions will occur to his readers. To them as to him, and to all the Christians of the first age, the Greek Old Testament is the Word of God to be received unquestioningly.

The God who has spoken in these last days through His Son is the same God who spoke in the early days through the fathers. It is not only that God speaks on the sacred page ; He spoke through the men of whom the sacred record tells us. It is true that the " revelation " was piecemeal, here a glimpse and there a vision ; true also that it came in a rich variety of forms : through victory and defeat, through the institution of a legal code or a great national deliverance ; that the messengers were poets, prophets and " wise men," soldiers and statesmen. Through it all God was speaking ; but God's messages, fragmentary and many-sided

as they were, have been summed up in His final Word, the Son, who has revealed to us the very self of God as God has never been revealed to us before ; Light of His Light, Impress of His very Being.

We note already in the prologue the curious way in which the whole Gentile world is ignored throughout the book, the complete absence of any suggestion that God had given even a dim twilight revelation of Himself outside of Judaism. The analogy of the rest of the epistolary literature of the New Testament discourages the otherwise tempting idea that the veil drawn over the Gentile world is an indication of a lack of missionary enthusiasm, which might account in part for the state of depressed religious vitality into which the readers had fallen.

The prologue provides us with another phenomenon which puzzles us not only in this epistle but in a large part of the New Testament literature, the chief exception being the first three Gospels. The Jesus who is the centre of the writer's thoughts is not the Jesus who walked the streets of Jerusalem and the country lanes of Galilee, who healed the sick and went about doing good, and sought to lead men to the Father. He is a heavenly figure who came from eternity and went to eternity, a being in some sense God, though this writer, like Paul, is careful to distinguish Him from God, one the chief event in whose life was His death. It

is true, as we shall see later, that this writer insists, as Paul and John do not, on the real manhood, the weakness, the sufferings, and temptation of the human Jesus. Yet to him as to them this human life was only an interlude in the eternal life of a Being whose place was eternally with God.

An immense amount of research work has shown us the origin of the categories that were so freely applied to Jesus by the early Church, and in particular has made it not improbable that in the case of certain of them, like " Lord " and "Saviour," some of the associations that these titles had in the world religions may have clung to them in the minds of Gentile Christians, even when applied to Jesus. It is no doubt something to know where the categories came from that enabled the first generations of Christians to explain in some measure to themselves and others what Jesus meant to them. The fact to be reckoned with is that men who had known Jesus, and others who knew of Him from them, did apply these titles to Jesus in His own generation.

Nevertheless it is, and perhaps will always remain, something of a puzzle that in their writings and public utterances they made so few references to the earthly life of Jesus. For this no doubt one chief reason was that the death of Jesus was not to them the catastrophe that it seems to the unbeliever. Jesus Himself seems to have encouraged His followers to think of death as a comparatively

unimportant event in the history of one who has the life which is life indeed ; and this part of His teaching seems to have gone home. The writers of the New Testament do not think of Jesus in the past tense but in the present. To them He is alive for evermore, and with Him they have communion as real and effective as His friends had in the days of His flesh ; nay, more real and effective.

Again, we have always to place all the other New Testament writings against the background of the first three Gospels. While Paul was engaged on his missionary tours, and while he was writing his epistles, the stories of Jesus' sayings, doings, and experience were being treasured, sifted, compared, and collected. It is true that in the case of Paul especially, we can easily show that he must have known a great deal about the facts of Jesus' life ; by careful search through his writings we can establish, as has often been done, the fact that he did know a great deal more than appears on a superficial reading. But the great point is that the heavenly Christ of Paul presupposes the Jesus of whom we read in the pages of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. 1 Corinthians, for example, is simply soaked in the Synoptic tradition. And is not the conception of the great high priest who feels with us and for us, redolent of the memory of the Jesus who, in the phrase of Matthew's fine quotation, " Himself

took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (viii. 17)? We sometimes forget, too, that the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels is a rediscovery of our own generation. The Christology of the New Testament was not the stumbling-block to our fathers that it is to so many in our day.

It was a true instinct that led the author of "To the Hebrews" and other New Testament writers to emphasise, as they did, the question of what we call "the person of Christ." If Jesus was only one of ourselves, making one more guess at truth, then the appeal of Christianity is immeasurably weakened. The Introduction claims that the voice of God has never been silent in the world, that the world did not then first become Christian when Jesus entered it, that the music of the spheres as they revolve is Christian music. To know Jesus is to know God.

## CHAPTER V

## MORE THAN A MINISTERING SPIRIT
## (i. 5–14)

From verse 4 to the end of chap. i. is one of the sections of the epistle that are apt to strike a modern reader as barren. Coming after the magnificent prologue, it has almost the effect of bathos. In this section the author tries, by methods of which the modern exegetical conscience does not approve, to demonstrate a point that does not seem to us worth demonstrating, a point which nevertheless he thinks worthy of the final place in the Introduction : that the Son is superior to the angels, the measure of His superiority being the excellence of the name He has " inherited " (one of the author's favourite words) in comparison with theirs.

It is hardly credible that this section, however remote it may seem from the problems of our time, was for that day simply a piece of abstract and pointless theology. It deals with some real difficulty of the readers, though unfortunately we have lost the key to it. Even in the quotations in this section the author can take for granted that

he carries his readers with him when he assumes that the passages he quotes refer to the Messiah and that Jesus was the Messiah. But there seems to have been a tendency to regard Jesus as an angel, one angel among the others. It is easy for us who date our years from the birth of Christ to give Jesus in our thought a position of unchallenged supremacy. To realise the situation we have to think ourselves back into the time when the Christian Church was still in its infancy and traditions were only gradually being established ; or when, even though there was a well-defined "Christianity," any particular Church might be tempted by local circumstances to develop on lines of its own.

We who have been brought up in the atmosphere of Western thought and Western science are apt to think of people whose world teems with angels and spirits as abnormal folk who are intellectually outside the pale ; to forget that it is we with our uncompromising monotheism, our scientific outlook and our sceptical approach to the whole supranatural world who are abnormal. From the pages of the New Testament itself we can see the large part played in the Jewish thought of the time by the belief in angels. This article in the creed of many Jews may have been partly of Persian origin ; but the interposition of spirits, good or evil, is such an obvious explanation of many of the otherwise uninterpreted facts of life, that

in no case need we assume that the belief is imported.

The idea may have developed partly through the unconscious desire to provide God with a Court on the analogy of Oriental potentates, partly through the concentration of worship in a single sanctuary necessitating heavenly messengers when men away from the central sanctuary would communicate with God. Angels were no doubt partly also introduced to cross the gulf that men had created between themselves and God by their increasing sense of His unapproachable majesty. Jesus apparently accepted many of the current beliefs in angels, but in spite of His frequent references to them they play practically no part in His ministry.

Jesus' consciousness of direct communion with God left no room and no need for intermediate agencies. The most significant passage in that connection occurs in the story of the arrest, where Matthew tells us Jesus refused to ask for the angelic help which nevertheless He believed was freely at His disposal (xxvi. 53). The negligible part that angels play during the actual ministry of Jesus is all the more striking in view of the repeated intervention of angels, dreams, and visions in the story of His birth, infancy, and resurrection. It is a testimony to the way in which a real picture of Him dominated the tradition, even when that tradition was handed down by

men who were only too ready to believe in the supernatural.

From the epistle to the Colossians we see how very real the danger was that professed Christians, before they realised the unique significance of Jesus for the new religion, might be led into some form of angel worship. There is however no certainty that the readers of "To the Hebrews" were tempted to any angel cult, and there are at least two other possibilities. Both Paul (Gal. iii. 19) and Stephen (Acts vii. 53) refer to a Jewish tradition which represented angels as sharing with God in the giving of the Law. There seem to have been different interpretations of this tradition: Paul apparently uses this angelic intervention to disparage the Law; while on Stephen's view angels, by handing on the Law, added to its dignity and so to the offence of those who disobeyed it. It may be then that the point of this writer is that Jesus is superior to the Law typified by the angels. Or again, the angels may represent the whole material world, which under the old dispensation was regarded as being under the dominion of angels, each nation for example having its own guardian angel.

While the point at issue may not be absolutely clear, it seems safe to say that the writer is seeking to safeguard two truths. One is that with Jesus begins an absolutely new era; the old world of legal institutions, the world which is on the whole

material, is passing away ; the world of spiritual realities, God's world, is about to be revealed. The other is that in the new age Jesus remains supreme at God's right hand, without a rival.

If the point the writer tries to make in this section is foreign to our habits of thought, the manner in which he proves it is one with which we are only too familiar. The Old Testament is regarded as a great storehouse of proof-texts ; the proof may lie more in the apparent relevance of some word or phrase than in the bearing the text has on the passage from which it is taken. In extenuation of the use made of Scripture in this epistle two pleas may be urged. One, the more important, is that for the author the Scripture quotations are not the real proof of the points he makes. He employs Scripture rather to buttress a conclusion he has reached by quite another road. The other is his conviction that in Scripture God is speaking and God's word must be fulfilled. If it is not fulfilled in its original signification, it is only because God has destined for it a larger and later fulfilment.

i. 5

First he gives two Scripture quotations to prove that the name Son is superior to the name Angel. In the second psalm someone, whom both writer and readers regard, and perhaps rightly regard, as the Messiah, is addressed by God in the terms : " Thou art my Son ; to-day have I become thy

father." Angels, he claims, are never called Sons of God. (This is not quite correct of the Hebrew Bible, but the writer used the Greek Old Testament.) A second proof is then brought forward. When David proposed to build a temple for the ark, Jahweh declined the offer, but, speaking through the prophet Nathan, promised to establish the kingdom of David's "seed." "I will be his father and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. vii. 14). (In applying this text to the Messiah the writer has the justification that the context does seem to show that from the beginning the words were understood to have a wider reference than to any particular Jewish king.)

i. 6

Next he proceeds to establish that the function of the Son is superior to the function of the angels as His name is superior to theirs. At the end of the noble Song of Moses in the edition of the Greek Bible used by this writer a phrase occurs: "Let God's angels worship Him" (Deut. xxxii. 43). Apparently this meant "Let them worship God," but this writer by "Him" understood the Messiah and represented the verse as God's introduction of the Messiah to the world.

i. 7

Continuing his argument, the writer quotes Psalm civ. 4, where the psalmist says that God "turns his angels into winds, his attendants into a fiery

flame." It is tempting to suppose that the psalmist meant that God uses the winds as His messengers, a flaming fire as His attendants. But if the original meaning has been changed, it was done by the Greek translators, not by the author of "To the Hebrews." The lesson he finds in the words is that the angels, instead of being eternal and unchangeable like the Son, are evanescent and change their form.

i. 8, 9

With this he contrasts a quotation from Psalm xlv. This psalm was originally written in honour of the marriage of some king, possibly an Israelitish king. It owed its place in the Canon to the fact that it had been interpreted Messianically. This writer adopts this interpretation and finds the psalm in several ways suitable for his purpose. The *righteous* rule of the king, and his *anointing* with the oil of *gladness* typified for him the Christ, the *Anointed*, the *Righteous*, with His message of *Good News*. But the quotation has two special attractions for him. It records the permanence of the Messiah's dominion, which we now see over against the facility with which the angels who have no thrones are reduced to the shadow of a shade. In the last line the bridegroom king is described as happier than all his fellows (i.e. all the contemporary princes). The writer interprets this allegorically: The Messiah is blessed above all possible rivals, especially the angels.

i. 10–12

One more Scripture quotation helps out the argument. At the end of Psalm cii. God is addressed as the maker of heaven and earth, and He who changes not is contrasted with the swiftness and completeness of the destruction that will one day be theirs. The word "Lord" which has somehow become inserted in the first line of the Greek version of the psalm gives this writer, doubtless following a current tradition, the opportunity of representing the Messiah as the creator who remains unmoved and immovable amid the ruins of the universe.

i. 13

It is characteristic of the author that he keeps till the last the quotation which must have been in his mind all the time, from Psalm cx., a psalm on whose significance Jesus had pondered and invited others to ponder, a psalm which plays a prominent part in the New Testament and especially in this epistle. In the original psalm a priest king of the Jews is invited to sit beside God as His deputy. The author of "To the Hebrews" finds in it the assurance that after His ascension the great high priest will share the throne of God, an honour promised to no angel.

If all this seems to the modern reader uninteresting and unprofitable, yet some drudgery of the kind must be undertaken if we are to get the author's point of view, with reference for example

to the nature and interpretation of Scripture, the meaning of prophecy and the position of Jesus in the scheme of things. By a road that seems to us tortuous he has reached his goal, namely Scripture support for his conviction that Jesus is God's Son as no other is God's Son ; that He reigns, reigns in righteousness, and reigns alone with God ; the same for ever, unchanging and unchangeable.

i. 14

The writer concludes with a curious depreciatory criticism of the angels. They are only ministering spirits, they go where they are sent, their mission is to serve, to serve the future heirs of salvation. Has he forgotten that his great high priest came not to be ministered unto but to minister ?

## CHAPTER VI

## THE MYSTERY OF PAIN AND DEATH
(ii. 1–4)

THE beginning of the second chapter clarifies the situation. It shows us that even in the "proof-text" section of chapter i. what we have is not a scholastic theologian trying to score points, but a preacher, striving with the weapons with which he was familiar, by methods moreover which must have carried conviction to his readers, to uphold the crown rights of His Lord, and to save his people from the destruction that he saw impending. In this next section too it is the pastor who speaks, the shepherd whose heart is sore and anxious for the sheep who are no longer content with the safety of the old sheep-fold.

ii. 1, 2

"That is why," he begins. The complicated proof-text argument has been leading up to a very practical point. They are in danger of drifting away from their moorings and he would deliver them. In vi. 19 again he thinks of the Christian hope as an anchor that holds. We are familiar in modern times with warnings not to drift away

from the old moorings. Our experience inclines us to associate these admonitions with obscurantist attempts to block the progress of Christian thought. Men who are afraid of new ideas cannot appeal for support to the author of this epistle. What they mean is that the Christian mind should remain stationary while the stream of thought flows by. His meaning is that the Christian soul should remain anchored while the stream of temptation flows by. As a matter of fact, the safeguard against temptation he is about to propose is that they should advance to new and higher thoughts of Jesus, that they should no longer be content with the old formulæ, but should get a firmer hold on the Christian faith by getting a vision of Jesus at a new angle.

The Old Testament Law, in giving which, according to Jewish tradition, angels were God's mouthpiece, was nevertheless a valid Law. Men disobeyed it at their peril. Disobedience was sometimes punished by God Himself, as in the case of the wilderness generation ; even when inflicted by God's human representatives it had divine sanction and was in fact God's punishment. God's new revelation has been given not through angels but through the Lord Himself. God is not mocked. We can turn a deaf ear to it if we will, but the consequences will be more terrible than for those who infringed the ordinances of the older imperfect revelation.

This preacher then is a prophet, a man after the heart of Thomas Carlyle, who is convinced that we are living in a serious world, where if we choose we may live frivolously and foolishly, but in the end life pays back.

Nor is this just a passing mood of one, who on the whole thinks nothing matters very much. It is the fixed conviction of a stern prophet of God ; his reading of Scripture and his reading of life. He utters such warnings repeatedly, and towards the end of the letter he tells his readers again : " If there was no way of escape for them who refused the warning message spoken on earth, how much less will there be for us if we turn our backs on Him who warns from heaven ! " (xii. 25). Does not the absence of this note from our preaching account for much of its ineffectiveness ? We have dismissed hell from our thoughts. We have explained that all the imagery connected with the word is only imagery, and have tacitly inferred that therefore the thing has no significance.

What is the fate in store for those who refuse to listen to the Divine word spoken through Jesus ? The writer does not tell us. Twice in four verses he speaks of salvation (i. 14, ii. 3). What does he mean by salvation ? He does not tell us. But he knows that to have what Jesus can give us is to be saved, to refuse to have it is to be lost, and that between these two there is a great gulf fixed. It reminds us of the concluding words of the

parable of the prodigal. To be away from the home, living the self-centred life, is to be lost. To be with the father, with whatever shamefacedness we return, is to be found. The difference between the most inglorious return and the failure to return is such that all men of good will must make merry and be glad, though the wanderer creep home in rags.

ii. 3

The writer would convince his readers of the genuineness of the Gospel message. He has four proofs. Are they very different from the proofs by which we convince ourselves? First, the original message came from God, speaking through the Lord, speaking not only through His teaching but through His whole life and His death. God revealing Himself in and through Jesus is the basis of the Christian Gospel. But in the second place, comparatively few people heard Jesus. Most people in His own day, and all in later days, had to depend on human agency for the transmission of the message. Yet this writer is convinced that, to the best of their ability, they handed on the message intact. If the Church leaders of the first and second generations completely transformed the Gospel of Jesus, as we are so often told that they did, at least they were quite unconscious of doing so; nor so far as we have any record had any of the immediate followers of Jesus any consciousness that this was happening. Further, while it would

be foolish to pretend that the story of Jesus' ministry is told in the New Testament entirely in what we now know as the scientific spirit, yet we note the importance attached by Luke, in the Introduction to his Gospel, to the testimony of eye-witnesses, and by this writer to the testimony of ear-witnesses.

ii. 4

In the third place, when the message was proclaimed, God added His testimony ; signs and marvels and manifold exhibitions of His power. Fourthly, in His own inexplicable but reasonable way, God followed the preached word with the equipment of spiritual gifts ; to each his own appropriate spiritual gifts, since no man can monopolise the Spirit. But whatever their spiritual endowment, those who heard and received the message were manifestly new men, with an effectiveness they had never had before.

(ii. 5–18)

ii. 5

The writer then comes to closer grips with his subject ; but first, in a parenthetic clause, he gives us a revealing glimpse into his purpose : " the world to come, which is my subject." A superficial reading of the epistle might leave us with the impression that his main subject is the Melchizedec high-priesthood of Jesus. It is the leading subject in the sense that it occupies the

central place in his argument and that his thoughts pivot round it ; but looking deeper we see that his real subject is, as he himself says it is, the future world ; or, to put it in his own phraseology, the world of eternal, unseen realities. He wants to lead his readers from the shadow to the substance, to deliver them from bondage to the cramped life that is bounded by the seen and temporal, to bring them into a large place and let them breathe the free air of God's real world. His ambition for them is that they should be men of faith who can pierce through the shadows of sense to the truth, through the mists to the certain future that they hide.

He has been speaking of angels. Perhaps now there is a certain half-conscious impatience with the whole scheme of thought in which these intangible beings played so large a part. In any case the dominion of the angels, if they had any, is in the past : their day is done ; the future is with man. There is a fine Christian optimism in this section. Man's ultimate triumph is assured ; God is bringing many sons into glory. But questions arose then as they arise now. If the coming of Jesus divided the world into two eras, if the powers of the Messianic age are at work in the world, why is there not clearer evidence of it ? To some it seems questionable even in our day whether on the whole we are making progress.

Apparently to the first readers of " Hebrews "

it was more than a speculative question. As we see from chapter ii., they were still face to face with the great human enemies : temptation, suffering, sin, fear, and death. Their religious faith was being shaken. The writer reminds them of Him who won the victory for them by sharing their experiences and fighting their battles. But this only pushes the question one stage farther back. Why had the Christ to suffer the pain, the humiliation, of the Cross, of an agonising death, of apparent defeat ?

Here again it is easy, or we think it easy, for us with whom for nearly two millennia the Cross has been the symbol of all we hold noblest and dearest, to understand why Christ should die on the Cross. Our crosses are dainty, shining things of precious metal ; we wear them as ornaments. But the men of that day were near enough the beginning of things to be able to picture, if they had not seen, the hideous reality, the scene on Calvary, when, by a decision of the " impartial " Roman authority, amid the jeers and triumphant laughter of the leaders of His own people, Jesus had been tortured to the death that was the most shameful as well as the most painful of all. And this was the Jesus they were asked to accept as God's last word to mankind. Not only so ; but they themselves had had some taste of what their Master had suffered, and it was no bright outlook they still faced.

ii. 6–8.

For guidance the author turns to a psalm, the eighth, and, as before, he interprets the psalm in his own way. The psalmist, contrasting the insignificance of man with the wonders of the heavens, gives thanks to God for the lofty place which God has nevertheless assigned to man. In the usual way of Hebrew poets the psalmist expresses the glory of man in two parallel sentences : " Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels " (in the Hebrew : " little less than divine ") : " with glory and honour hast thou crowned him." The writer understands the first clause (which he found in his Greek Bible) to mean : Thou hast put man for a little while in subjection to the angels. Thus he finds in the psalm three inspired statements about God's destiny for man. " God has for a time subjected him to the control of angels " (in the " former age "). " God has crowned him with glory and honour. God has put all things under his feet." On his interpretation of Scripture the first of these three utterances is a statement of fact ; the second and third are prophecies. They are however prophecies which are as yet obviously unfulfilled.

ii. 9

Though they have not been fulfilled in the case of men in general, the first of the two has been in the case of one man, the Man Jesus. He has been crowned with glory and honour. He has

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High, having for ever opened for us the way to God. The Jesus who has done this was one of us. In a very real sense it is man that has been crowned with glory and honour. The life of Jesus and His final triumph have given an uplift to the whole human race, revealing in us unsuspected potentialities, calling us to achievements hitherto impossible. This again is no mere fanciful speculation. With the history of the Church behind us, we know it is a correct interpretation of what Jesus has done for us.

If the first prophecy has been fulfilled, if man in the person of Christ has been crowned with glory and honour, the second will with equal certainty be fulfilled : God will put all things under His feet. Man's final triumph is assured. The writer here is trying to comfort and fill with new courage men whose religious faith is waning through what they have to suffer. To get a message for them he turns to a text of Scripture. Really what he has to tell them is that Jesus has suffered and Jesus has triumphed. What He did, He did for us. In His triumph we too shall triumph.

But this still leaves unanswered the question : Why had Jesus to suffer ? To understand the earnestness with which this question was asked we have to remember the attitude to suffering of the non-Christian world. Hinduism and Buddhism are both in large measure attempts to solve the problem of pain. The doctrine of transmigration

is the Hindu solution : suffering is the punishment of sin, of sin committed in a previous existence. Buddhism makes a further contribution : be kindly towards all sufferers in a world where there is no God. The Jews seemed largely to have forgotten the wonderful conception of God's Suffering Servant ; or, to speak more correctly, it had hardly dawned on them that the vicarious Sufferer whose stripes brought healing to others might be the Messiah Himself. They clung to their picture of the victorious Messiah who would reign till He had put all things under His feet. Mahommedans found the story of a crucified Jesus so repugnant that they refused to give it a place in their sacred book.

It has been said that the Christian is the only man who is ashamed of his religion. It is not quite true : the educated Hindu is ashamed, if not of his religion, at least of many of the beliefs and practices of his religion. But in so far as the element of shame does enter into the profession of Christianity, and none can deny that it does enter very largely, is it not due in large measure to the feeling that the Cross, representing as it does self-abnegation, is no fit symbol for the red-blooded descendants of long lines of fighting ancestors, whose glory it has been to triumph over others ?

ii. 10ff.

The writer now wrestles with this problem. In one of those memorable phrases he strikes out for

us, he calls Jesus the Captain of our Salvation. To this function He was appointed by God who was the creator as He is the goal of all that is. (Incidentally we are reminded of the danger of building systems of dogmatic theology on this writer's phrases. In i. 2 the world was made through Jesus, in ii. 10 through God.) It was in accordance with God's character that He should equip thoroughly for His work the Captain of our Salvation. That equipment involved a baptism of suffering.

Why should this be so? He does not, as we might expect he would, quote one of the words of Jesus in which He tried to revolutionise the current conception of the victorious Messiah, in which He dealt with the mystery and the redemptive value of suffering. Nor does he turn to Isaiah liii. He takes a line of his own. The passage is suffused nevertheless with the teaching of the Suffering Servant passages, and of Jesus on the meaning of suffering. "It was in accordance with the nature of God, who is at once the author and the interpretation of the universe, to equip by suffering the Captain of man's salvation." One reason is that men have to suffer and He who would save them must share their sufferings. If we would save the "slum" dwellers we must live the "slum" life. We might "save the heathen" by sending them suitable literature, but we can do it more effectively by living among them and, as far as may be, sharing their life.

We are for ever grateful to the writer of this epistle for insisting as he does that Jesus became one of us. So often the New Testament writers (we see the tendency at work even in the Gospels) thought they were honouring Jesus by removing Him from us as far as possible, till sometimes He hardly seems to have anything in common with ourselves. This writer gives Jesus a place in the heavens as lofty as any New Testament writer gives Him, but he will not let us forget that He is nevertheless one of ourselves. Those who tell us that the truth we have to contend for is not the divinity of Jesus but the divinity of man, if they are not always very intelligible or very helpful, do seem to get some support from this chapter. "He who consecrates and they who are consecrated have one common Father." Jesus and His followers are children of one Father (almost suggesting they had been brothers in eternity).

The Jesus of this section is the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels ; the sympathetic, helpful, pitying friend, the never-failing, leal-hearted brother. We have to live our lives with bodies of flesh and blood. These are the sources of our temptations, the seat of our sufferings ; these contain the seeds of our decay. Since Jesus was our brother and was to be our deliverer, He too wore a human body, with its capacity for temptation and suffering and its certainty of death.

Yet even in the earliest strata of the Synoptic

Gospels there is no trace of any period when Jesus was just a greater one among the others. He was always *The* one. This writer suggests the same when he tells us that Jesus was not ashamed to call them brothers, just as he tells us later that God was not ashamed to be called the God of the patriarchs (xi. 16) so long as they chose the painful path of faith. The Son of Man is sometimes ashamed of His brothers, not because they are His brothers, but because they are ashamed of Him and shrink from the hard choice He puts before them (Mark viii. 34f.).

How does this writer know that Jesus was "brother" of the human race? We expect him to point to the fact that He called God Father, as He taught His disciples to call God Father; or to quote: "Whoever does God's will, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark iii. 35); or to refer to the words of the risen Christ: "Go tell my brothers to go off to Galilee and there shall they see me" (Matt. xxviii. 10). He was evidently debarred by the theological prepossessions of the day from clinching his argument in this effective way.

Instead of this he puts as usual far-fetched constructions on certain Old Testament passages. The first twenty-one verses of Psalm xxii. are a despairing cry for help. In the agony of the Cross Jesus had echoed its opening words: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His

enemies had used verse 8 as a taunt song: "He trusted in the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him save him, since He delights in him" (quoted as in the Greek version). The early Church regarded the psalm as Messianic.

In verse 22, which may have been originally the beginning of another psalm, and where in any case the tone changes to one of triumphant thanksgiving for answered prayer, the psalmist sang: "I will declare thy name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will sing thy praise." The author of "Hebrews" finds in these words the Messiah joining with His fellow-worshippers, whom He calls His brothers, as a member of the congregation, in thanks to God for a great deliverance (ii. 12). The fact that at the end of the psalm even the heathen to the ends of the earth are represented as being moved by the story of God's marvellous grace to Israel, was no doubt one of the attractions for him of this interpretation.

He finds Messiah's brotherhood with man not only in the "Psalms" but in "Isaiah." In patient hope Isaiah had said (viii. 17f.), "And I will put my trust in Him (God). Behold I and the children whom God has given me. And they shall be signs and wonders in the house of Israel from the Lord of Hosts who dwells in Mount Zion" (quoted as in Greek version); that is, "my name" (Jehovah saves) "and the symbolic names I have given my children are living sermons, incarnate pledges of

the future." "He could not look on them without thinking of the future and of God." [1] The writer, for some reason unknown to us, separates the two quotations though in "Isaiah" the one follows immediately on the other, cuts the second off sharp in the middle, and represents the whole as spoken by Messiah. He thus makes the points: first, that Messiah trusts God like one of ourselves; and second, that we as God's children, given to the Messiah, are in some sense His brothers. In all this, of course, we have to remember that, by methods satisfactory to his readers, he is proving a point of which he is already convinced by quite other arguments.

If Jesus was to do for us all that we need, one particular enemy He had to face was death. The fear of death is universal; courage can rise no higher than to face death fearlessly; self-sacrifice can go no farther than to lay down one's life for one's friends. But the Jewish fear of death was something other and deeper than the universal, largely physical dread of it. It was a religious fear which it is difficult for us fully to understand. The stories in the second and third chapters of Genesis which suggested that death was the penalty of disobedience to God were doubtless partly the cause and partly the effect of the feeling.

The earlier Hebrew belief that death meant not

[1] Quoted from "Isaiah," by J. E. McFadyen, in *Bible for Home and School Series*.

only the loss of all on earth that men hold dear but the end of communion with God, would intensify the natural shrinking from death ; while another factor at work was the increasing conviction with which in later Judaism the creed was held : After death, the judgment. Satan too tempts to sin which leads to death. Death indeed was regarded as peculiarly the domain of Satan, who was even believed to have some power of inflicting death ; for in 1 Corinthians v. 5 Paul consigns to Satan " for the destruction of his flesh " the man who was guilty of incest, " that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord " ; evidently meaning that he wished the man's body to die for the salvation of his soul.

All this would give the thought of death a repulsiveness beyond even that which we know. With Paul too the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. xv. 26). These facts light up for us the part which the resurrection of Jesus played in the thought and life of His first followers, help us to understand the triumph with which Paul sang : " O death, where is thy victory ? O death, where is thy sting ? " (1 Cor. xv. 55).

ii. 14ff.

Jesus, says the author, by sharing our human frame, by dying our death, was able to overthrow the devil in his very stronghold, and so to free from slavery those who were under a lifelong fear

of death. It was not angels that Jesus came to help, but Abraham's seed, the company of the faithful, men of flesh and blood. Angels may have their problems ; but these bodyless creatures are not subject to the passions and temptations, have not to face the suffering and death, that are the lot of men. It was into this suffering, striving, dying human world that Jesus entered. Then, by an artifice of which he is fond, the author gives a hint, as yet only a hint, of the subject which fills his mind. This Jesus is our high priest, trusty and full of pity, winning from God forgiveness for our sins. It was because He was to be our high priest that He had to share our nature at all points. He suffered by His temptations, as we suffer by ours, and so He can help us in our need.

Thus at the end of the road, an unnecessarily winding road as it may seem to us, and one that has taken us by some very unfamiliar scenery, we begin to see whither we have arrived. The author has given us his version of the modern " struggling God." All that the readers have to say about their hard lot, the sufferings they have endured and that still face them, is true. He does not minimise the sufferings. It is true too that God seems to hold His hand and make no sign. He can understand how they are " tempted " to give up their faith, which seems to have no foundation in fact.

" But look at the other side," he says. Suffering

is not the enemy you think it is. It does not necessarily mean that God is angry, still less that God is forgetful. The humiliation must come, it is God's way ; but it brings discipline, it has redeeming power. Suffering has its roots deep in the heart of God. Nor does God stand outside it all. He has given us Jesus, who is the exalted Christ but is nevertheless one of ourselves, our brother. Because Jesus has lived our life, our triumph is sure. He has been crowned with glory and honour, and we shall be crowned with glory and honour. Jesus suffered as we suffer, was tempted to give up His faith in God as we are tempted to give up our faith. He met and conquered Satan in his very throne, in death itself. We can take fresh courage then. Our high priest has not only opened for us the way to God, but at every step of the way His understanding compassion and help are freely ours.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE SABBATH REST OF GOD
(iii. 1–iv. 13)

WHAT advantage had the readers taken of the great gift that God had given them? The author is evidently afraid that the answer is in some doubt. He has in mind a well-known historic precedent, the generation that came out of Egypt. They too had had a heaven-sent leader, who should have been the Captain of their salvation. God had done great things for them; but on the way they were called on to endure physical suffering; they were sometimes in straits from which they saw no escape. Their leader had remained loyal, loyal alike to God and his people; but the faith of the followers had failed, and they never saw the Promised Land. Was the tragic experience to be repeated under far more tragic circumstances?

iii. 1ff.

For the first time the readers are directly addressed, "Consecrated brothers": brothers of each other, of the author, of Jesus; consecrated, called to a new way of life by Jesus, as he had

already reminded them (ii. 11). He has already said that his subject is the world to come: the other, the unseen, the higher life. They share, he tells them now, a heavenly calling. They have heard God's voice, God's call to them to rise above the things on which other men set their hearts; to have a new scale of values, to see the old joys and sorrows in their relative unimportance and have higher and purer emotions.

Jesus was fond of telling people to use their minds. "Study the ravens," He had said; "study the lilies." This writer uses the same word now with effect. "Since God has given you this captain, brother and priest, equipped at all points to help, *study* Him." Moses in his day was an apostle, an ambassador sent by God. He had also performed the priestly functions till he delegated them to Aaron. In the darkest hours Moses had been loyal to his trust. "Study Jesus, the apostle and high priest of *our* confession." (This phrase possibly but not certainly suggests that the readers were already familiar with the title of high priest as applied to Jesus.)

The reference to Moses' faithfulness is based on the story of God's rebuke to Miriam and Aaron when they were jealous of Moses (Num. xii. 6–8). "In all my house he is faithful. Mouth to mouth will I speak to him," not in dreams and visions as God speaks to the prophet. In other words Moses was "far ben" with God. On the

mount Moses had seen the realities of which the earthly tabernacle and its furniture were but shadows and copies (Ex. xxv. 40). On another Mount long afterwards Moses had stood beside Elijah with Jesus in a vision that foreshadowed to the three disciples the sacrifice of the great high priest.

Yet the very passage in which God gave this tribute to what Paul calls the evanescent glory of Moses (2 Cor. iii. 7) suggests the greater glory of Jesus. The author had been speaking of "sons." But sons dwell in a house, the father's home. Moses was faithful in all God's *house* (Num. xii. 7). Jesus' thoughts too had centred much round God's house, the temple made with hands. Perhaps almost to the last He had cherished the thought of a cleaner and holier temple which might be once again a place of prayer. In a mystic utterance, the key to which we have perhaps lost, He had said that if the temple were destroyed, He would build another house for God, a house not made with hands (Mark xiv. 58). One of Jesus' most memorable sayings, as is true also of the parable of the prodigal, had centred round the family metaphor (Mark iii. 34f.). The idea of Jesus' followers as the house of God had gripped the imagination. Paul pictured the Church of God as a house whose foundation was Jesus Christ, though it was left to men to build the superstructure. The author of 1 Timothy calls "the Church of the living God" "the house of God" (iii. 15).

This great household of faith had existed in the world long before Jesus had entered it, as we are to learn more fully when the roll of the heroes of faith is called in the eleventh chapter. Moses had a position of authority in it as well as Jesus. But whereas Moses had a charge *in* the house, Jesus was a Son *over* the house. Whatever Moses did He did "according to all that the Lord commanded." But Jesus spoke and acted as one "having authority." The servant does not abide in the house for ever, the Son abides for ever (John viii. 35). We seem here to get an echo of the challenge which in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus flung out to the sufficiency of the Law. The kind of morality which expresses itself in a code, whose watchwords are "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" can never be the morality of a kingdom which is not of this world. It does not probe sufficiently deep, nor trace the act far enough back into past history, nor take account of the struggle that so often precedes the act. The citizen of the kingdom has to yield the homage of heart and brain as well as of the will. Perhaps also both in this contrast between the Son and the servant, and in the phrase "a Son whom He made heir of all things" (i. 2) there is a reminiscence of the parable of the wicked vinedressers.

iii. 6ff.

This then is the household of faith to which author and readers belong. But they do not

automatically remain members of this household. No writer in the New Testament is farther removed than this from the view sometimes attributed to Paul of a semi-physical or wholly physical efficacy of the sacraments. To him religion is the willing surrender of willing men to the living God, a surrender not made once for all, but so made at the beginning that it becomes a perpetual surrender.

There must have been some reason in the local circumstances why he returns again and again to this point, that some experience through which we have passed in bygone days can never be a guarantee of our "salvation." We must *cling* to our Christian faith with a manly, costly clinging. He calls our religion "the hope," by which he means our certainty of the future. We hear the authentic Christian note in the stress he lays on the duty of Christian optimism, on the need of confidence, of being proud of our faith rather than ashamed of it. This word "confidence" (iii. 6, the same word as is used of Peter and John in Acts iv. 13) means what in religious circles is sometimes called "liberty," liberty of utterance for example. The "Acts of the Apostles," especially its earlier chapters, testifies to the way in which the new power at work in the world delivered men from all the fears that shackle and disable us : fear of pain or of poverty, fear of "big" men or of standing alone, fear of ridicule, of public opinion, fear of death itself. Jesus came, as the writer

"to the Hebrews" says, to deliver men from bondage.

The author now draws the moral from the story of the desert generation. It was the same story that Paul used for the same purpose in writing to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. x.). The special temptation of the Corinthian Christians was to suppose that participation in the sacraments gave an artificial immunity from the operation of the law that "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." This writer does not explicitly mention the sacraments, though it does not follow that the real point was different. He himself attached great importance to the silence of Scripture, and may at times have intended his own silence to be equally significant on points to which his readers held the clue. In modern times the temptation has often taken the form of supposing that a correct creed or good standing in some organisation which is a specially favoured channel of grace is a passport to eternal safety.

Paul himself drew the moral from the old story. This writer, as usual, prefers to find it drawn in the Old Testament. He turns to Psalm xcv., and treats it with his usual freedom. In this psalm, written perhaps at a time of national renascence as at the end of the exile, God is represented as pleading with His people not to harden their hearts against His love as the desert generation had done. The great point the author of "Hebrews"

makes is his interpretation of the word " to-day," with which the quotation opens. Like Paul he understands " to-day " to mean his own day, not the day in which the psalm was written ; a fallacy of interpretation which is working havoc in " apocalyptic " circles in our own time.

iii. 12ff.

The preacher, or rather the pastor, speaks again. He is afraid of apostasy, of apostasy in its literal sense. To be a Christian is to have and to use the right of approach to God. " Let us draw near unto God through Jesus " is the text of the epistle. Apostasy is " standing apart from God," from the God for whom he uses one of his favourite phrases " the living God " (iii. 12 ; cf. ix. 14, xii. 22), the alert God who sees and knows and does things ; the God who expects from us no routine ceremonies or creed repeated by rote, but a living religion which taxes mind and heart and conscience. This kind of apostasy comes from loss of faith, from what he calls a " bad, unbelieving heart " (iii. 12).

In the struggle to retain our faith—and this writer thinks of the Christian Faith as something which in an unsympathetic and hostile world cannot be retained without a struggle—we can all encourage each other day by day in the fight that is renewed day by day. To the author of this epistle this work of encouragement is not the peculiar province of the apostle or of the priest (he never mentions

either), nor even of the "leader." He thinks of the Church as a company of brothers who need each other and can help each other (cf. x. 24ff.). We can point out to each other the specious way in which sin deceives us—the sin that "hardens the heart," that blinds us to the vision, quenches enthusiasm, and makes us commonplace, easy-going members of the Church. The particular temptation in view seems to be the tendency to say that we have taken far too tragic a view of religion, that multitudes of men whose religion is just part of their mental equipment and causes them no kind of annoyance, live decent lives and die decent deaths, that all through the generations thousands of Israelites, for example, had sought and found God though they had never heard of Jesus.

"We have a share in Christ" (just as "we have a share in the Holy Spirit" (vi. 4), though Paul's doctrine of mystical union with Christ does not appeal to this writer. To him Jesus is our pioneer, our captain who goes on before). But we retain our confidence in Him only so long as we hold fast the confidence of our first Christian experience. ("Confidence" is the same word as in xi. 1 : "Faith is our confidence in the things we hope for," our standing-ground). As long as God uses the word "to-day" and continues to plead with us, it is always open to us to listen ; but so long also is there the dreadful possibility that even if

we have at one time listened to God's message under the stress of persecution or of life's hard experiences we may gradually close our ears.

In this passage we hear the voice of a teacher who knows the peculiar temptations of the middle years of life. Doubtless he knew the parable of the sower. In any case he was familiar with the experience so graphically portrayed in the parable, the early dew of morning that is parched ere noon. We are as familiar with the experience as we are with the parable ; our very familiarity with it has blinded us to the pathos that Jesus saw in it. It is not only that tasks willed in hours of insight have to be fulfilled in hours of gloom, but that so often they are not fulfilled at all.

There is the first awakening to the liberating message that Jesus brings, the first glad response to the high demands the Gospel makes on us. Then, as time goes on, somehow the road is rougher than we thought it would be, and we are not quite so sure it is the road sensible men take. We become engrossed in business or anxious to have a good time, or it may be that we just follow the crowd, or that the price of following the Christ, the price in unpopularity or loss or pain, is greater than we are quite prepared to pay ; and we try to persuade ourselves that our youthful enthusiasms took insufficient account of the claims of common sense. We spare no pains to let the young see the vision ; might we not do more than we do to

help the middle-aged to keep on seeing it? One of the great New Testament virtues is "sticking to it," "holding out."

iii. 16ff.

In the concluding verses of chapter iii. the writer draws his uncompromising moral. He accepts wholeheartedly the Gospel of forgiveness and pity and Divine help, but of any belief in a God who is weakly indulgent or indifferent to sin there is no trace in the epistle. In spite of the great deliverance wrought by God for the wilderness generation, for forty years they provoked God to continual anger. (Some have found in this reference the suggestion that the author was writing forty years after the death of Jesus and believed that the crisis was therefore approaching.) Not only did their bones strew the wilderness, but God sentenced them to perpetual exclusion from His rest.

When Paul wrote a homily on the same subject (in 1 Cor. x.) he called attention to the idolatry and immorality of the Israelites. This writer dwells rather on the subtler fact that hardship, met in an unchastened spirit, can lead men to distrust and rebel against God. In iii. 18 and in iv. 6 he ascribes the failure of the Israelites to disobedience, as in iii. 19 he attributes it to want of faith. To him there is no difference. When we lose our childlike trust in God we cease our childlike obedience to God.

Paul regards the whole series of wilderness incidents as not only having been recorded but as having actually happened for the instruction of the Christians of his own day (1 Cor. x. 6, 11). To this writer the wilderness story is rather of the nature of a parable. As in the case of other parables we must not press the details too closely. If these Israelites had not been disobedient in the wilderness, would they have entered Canaan and found in it the everlasting Rest of God? The next chapter shows that the answer would be "No." Moreover, if they did not enter Canaan, their descendants did. Are we to assume that was because they had more faith than their fathers? And if it was only their want of faith and disobedience that excluded them, what excluded the heroes whose triumphs of faith and obedience are recorded in chapter xi.? They were excluded, he tells us, only because God wanted us from the beginning to share their bliss. Yet if, in strict logic, the application of the story leaves something to be desired, as a preacher's warning, a warning with the sanction of God behind it, it goes home.

iv. 1ff.

Once more comes the appeal, an appeal whose arguments and language-forms seem strange to us, yet are not so very strange when we take the trouble to understand them; and in any case as an undertone to the words we can hear the beating of the

shepherd heart, anxious for the eternal safety of his flock. In Psalm xcv. God had said: "They shall not enter into my rest." This writer emphasises the first word "they," that is, the men of the desert wanderings, and draws the inference that, although that generation was not destined to enter God's rest, a later generation would enter. The Alexandrian exegesis of the day allowed more startling conclusions than that to be drawn not only from the word of Scripture but from its silence.

It would be futile to ask whether some later generation such as that of David or Solomon, or the generation that returned from Babylon, might not be said to have entered God's "rest." He clearly means that until Christ came this rest had never been achieved. The desert generation is taken as typical, partly because they went astray at what might be described as the birth-crisis of the nation, partly because it was the generation referred to in his proof-text, Psalm xcv.

But what *is* God's "rest"? The phrase takes us back to the creation-story, when "God finished on the sixth day" (as in the Greek O.T.) "His works which He had made, and rested on the seventh day . . . from all His works which He began" (as in the Greek) "to make" (Gen. ii. 2, 3). The conception of God that underlies the whole Old Testament forbids us to think of God's rest as meaning inactivity. No nation has ever con-

ceived so unreservedly as the Jews an unceasing activity of God in all that happens. The virulence of Pharisaic antipathy to Jesus is explained partly by Jesus' attitude to this very question : whether the Sabbath rest means idleness or beneficent work. In the fourth Gospel Jesus defends His Sabbath cures by an appeal to God's unresting labours : "My Father works on till now. I too work on" (v. 17).

The interpretation put on God's rest by the author of "To the Hebrews" is thus a fine piece of Christian optimism. At first sight we seem here to be farther away from modern Christian thought than at any other point in the epistle. How can we continue to speak of God's rest, a phrase taken from the very beginning of the Bible ? Did not the story of man's sin come after that, with the pain and the shame and the contest against overwhelming odds that again and again seemed all but to break him ? Did God stand outside of it all, resting ? Do not the stories of the Good Shepherd and the father of the prodigal, does not the story of the Crucifixion mean that God grieves at our sin and suffers with our suffering, and yearns with a Father love for our redemption ?

It is all true ; yet there is a sense in which for God with the creation of man the struggle was over. Temptation would come and downfall, bitter suffering and humiliating defeat ; and yet the triumphant end was assured ; the element of un-

certainty was absent. The serpent might bite man's heel ; but the serpent even in his hour of seeming victory could only grovel among men's feet ; man, standing erect, with forward-looking eyes, even in defeat was infinitely nobler than the foul thing which had for the moment conquered him. The writer means that God from the beginning had that feeling of absolute confidence in final victory that permeates the New Testament ; there might be doubt whether this one or that one would hold fast ; the Lord Himself might go down to death, but the gates of Hades would never prevail against Him.

What then is meant by men sharing God's rest ? First we note the author's certainty that God *must* share with man, in accordance with the lofty conception of man that we have throughout the epistle. Christians who are sharers in Christ (iii. 14) and in the Holy Spirit (vi. 4) are sharers also with God, in His honours and privileges. But first a question has to be cleared out of the way. Although the generation that left Egypt had not entered Canaan, yet their descendants had, and Joshua had said to them : " The Lord your God has given you rest " (Joshua i. 13). To this his answer is that in Psalm xcv., written long after the wilderness experience, God had made a fresh offer of salvation, clearly showing that the first offer had not been accepted. If this does not carry conviction, again we have to remind ourselves that

it is only a scriptural buttress for his real argument. The entrance into Canaan was then, as it is now in our hymnology, a parable of the entrance into the eternal rest of God. The patriarchs too sought rest; but even those of them who sought and found the earthly Canaan did not find what they were seeking; their search was for a city with foundations, the city of the living God, built by no human hands.

There is a certain pathos in the choice of the "rest" metaphor to indicate the object of all human endeavour, the satisfaction of man's highest longing. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. Yes, saith the Spirit, for they shall rest from their labours, for their works follow with them" (Rev. xiv. 13). Part of the attraction of the Church of Rome is just that it offers us rest from anxious troubled thought, offers to solve for us our perplexing problems of faith and conduct. In some measure at least the attraction of the apocalyptic expectations that have had so strange a revival in our day is just that they offer to bring to a dramatic close the long, weary struggle that seems to come to nothing, to bring the Rest of utter satisfaction. In times of persecution too, it is very intelligible that men's notion of heaven should take the form of a blessed Rest with God.

Yet that was certainly not the whole of the author's thought. As usual he thinks of the fact

of Christ as but the second chapter of a story whose first chapter was told in the Old Testament, his Bible. The generation that left Egypt had the Gospel offer just as we have had it. Moses bore the reproach of Christ (xi. 26). The rest that was open to them is ultimately the rest that is open to us. That is certainly not a life of inactivity, but God's Sabbath rest, the rest of him who works with quiet confidence because he knows that the end is certain. There may indeed very well be, as there certainly is in Jesus' reference to the Divine Sabbath in the fourth Gospel, a hostile allusion to Rabbinic conceptions of an "idle" Sabbath.

The question with which this writer is face to face is the question that confronts us. To the Israelites looking back on the entrance to Canaan it seemed as if this ought to have been the beginning of the end, the beginning of a new creation. So in a sense it was ; but the great outstanding fact was that the struggle went on. The Rest of God was still in the future. Our problem is bigger. The Christ has come. Men thought it was the beginning of the end, of the new creation, of the Rest of God. And still through the centuries the struggle has gone on. Right has often been worsted and innocence debauched ; virtue and truth have been tortured ; mammon and the strong right arm have won many a triumph, and men are still far from God ; as far as ever, says the pessimist. Where, we ask, is the promise of

His coming? The pre-millennarian, and some who are not pre-millennarians, tell us that there is no promise of His coming, in the sense in which almost from the first the Church has understood it. The leaven is not going to leaven the whole lump; the mustard seed will never grow into a tree. Our only hope is that God will break suddenly, overwhelmingly, into the whole futile process and end it all.

This writer has a firmer faith in God. "We *have* entered God's Rest," he says; "we *are* entering it, *if we have faith.*" The struggle goes on, but the bitterness, the anxiety have been taken out of it. We toil on as men who know that the Creator, through whom and for whom are all things, the source and the goal of the creation, is the Father Almighty. We can rest, not as the idler rests, but as God rests, in the calm confidence that the universe is ours. Even we creatures of flesh and blood, in this world of temptation and sin, of pain and suffering and hostility, even we here and now can live in the world of eternal realities, lifted above the noise of the strife, through Him who has opened for us the Way. For us the ideal may be the real, as it was for Paul when he called the weak and quarrelsome Christians of Corinth saints, saints at least by vocation, saints by potentiality.

Yet this confidence is conditional: "if we have faith." "Therefore let us fear" (iv. 1). "There-

fore let us be in earnest" (iv. 11). The service of the living God needs living men, always ready (Matt. xxiv. 44), always alert (Matt. xxiv. 42), belts buckled and lamps lighted (Luke xii. 35).

iv. 11–13

Is it really, we seem to hear the readers asking, so very serious as all this? May we not hope to pass muster with the others? We have a good record behind us and we can still cut quite a respectable figure. The Word of God, the author replies, is not mocked. It is living, like God Himself, energising as He would have us energise, sharper than any sacrificial scalpel. As it searches us, it cuts right through the psyche and the spirit (as we should say, goes right through the mind to the very soul). It can, so to speak, separate the joints from the marrow. Our inmost thoughts that we try to hide even from ourselves are not proof against it. From it absolutely nothing is hid. Before the Word of God to whom we have to give account we stand naked.

The ideas and phrases are not all original. There are analogues to the passage in the Wisdom Literature, the apocalyptic literature, and especially in Philo. The Word of God is God in action, the God whose voice is heard in the Bible. Psycho-analysts tell us that if we would cease to be the victims of our past harrowing experiences or our guilty consciences, we must first face our past

frankly, see it for what it is. This writer tells us that in our self-examination the Word of God can help us to deal with our past, yes even with our present, with an honesty we could never reach unaided.

But God's final Word is His Son. The passage is a word-picture of Jesus the Revealer of men to themselves. We call to mind the searching honesty of the Sermon on the Mount that sheds its light on many a dark place in the human heart. We listen to the story of the prodigal, the rich fool, Dives and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer ; and in each case we seem to hear Jesus say : This is the picture as the world sees it ; now look at the truth. We follow Him as He meets Simon the Pharisee and the woman of the city and the rich ruler ; Zacchæus and Pilate and the dying thief. In the light of the Light of the World we see them in their naked reality, and as we see them, so we know that He sees us, so we learn to see ourselves. " Let us then be in deadly earnest."

## CHAPTER VIII

# IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH

(iv. 14–v. 14)

The preacher who has uttered this stern message of the inescapable truth of God, that pierces through the most specious of shams and knows us better than we know ourselves, changes his tone and becomes the Christian evangelist. In winning words that have moved generation after generation of disheartened men and women to face life's struggles again with a new heart, he tells them of God's graciousness and pity. The God who knows our littleness and our failure also knows our weakness and our strivings.

iv. 14f.

We come closer now to the subject of which we have twice had a hint (ii. 17 and iii. 1), Jesus as our high priest. If Jesus discovered pettiness and foulness in men to whom the world looked up, He also saw a memorable sacrifice where others noticed only a poor woman dropping a penny in a box ; the ointment, in which the bystanders read only culpable extravagance, spoke to Him of grateful love ; what to the eyes of conventional piety was a harlot plying her trade was to Him a

rapture of penitence and devotion. He taught men to see unsuspected possibilities of goodness and greatness in the most unpromising material. If on the one hand Jesus is God's Word, on the other He is our great High Priest. As the Levitical high priest passed through the outer sanctuary to the inner, so Jesus has passed through the heavens (which in Jewish theology separated men from God) right into the presence of God.

It is with no hostile God that our high priest pleads our cause, for He Himself is God's Son, the radiance of God's glory ; so that it is God's mind and purpose that speak through Him. " Let us cling to our confession since we have this gospel of Jesus as our high priest."

At this point the writer anticipates an objection. " This Jesus, our high priest, is and was a heavenly being, such as the writer describes in the opening verses of the epistle ; a being of another order than ours, who can look on our temptations with sympathy perhaps, but not with the sympathy that is born of experience since He Himself is raised far above all possibility of sin." The author was in far too close touch with the Gospel tradition to allow this for a moment.

In his passionate repudiation of the suggestion we hear the echo of the story of Jesus' temptations, told with a vivid realisation of the mortal struggle that lay behind the apparently simple narrative ; of Jesus' growing consciousness that

the way of life was the way of the Cross, of the attempt of well-meaning friends to turn Him from that way. We can feel behind it a realisation of the pain at the heart of Jesus as one after another of those of whom He had formed high hopes turned away, until finally "all the disciples forsook Him and fled." The author knew of His shrinking from the cup His Father had given Him to drink; knew also—may we not assume?—that the story of the Cross itself had shown how truly it was flesh and blood that was impaled on the Cross, however much the Gospel tradition had drawn a veil of kindly silence over that side of the tragedy. Above all, He knew of the cry of desolation in the Garden, knew that if his readers were tempted to think that God had forgotten them, their high priest with far more reason had been for a moment tempted to think that God had forgotten Him.

Our high priest then is also our leader; He asks us to go into no region of temptation or suffering He has not first trodden Himself. "Yet without sin." Does that not, we ask, limit His power of sympathy? Do not some of our fiercest temptations come from our past yielding? We are indeed sometimes told that those who have fallen and risen again can most surely speak the word of hope to those who are down. But the Christian instinct of this writer and of the young Church speaks more truly. We expect every minister of

the Christian Gospel to be a knight without fear and without reproach. Every stain on his honour, however sincerely it may be repented of, is a handicap in his ministry ; and there comes a point of moral failure beyond which usefulness in the ministry is ended. Christian men want to feel that their leaders know their temptations ; they also want to feel that it is not beyond human strength and the grace of God to surmount them. Outside of the Synoptic tradition this epistle alone emphasises the possibility that Jesus might fall ; the New Testament witness is unanimous that He did not.

It was unfortunate that the Church hit on the negative and inert phrase, " the sinlessness of Jesus," to describe what was in fact a positive, living, loving holiness. We are told that the conception of a sinless Messiah had arisen before the days of Jesus, and that therefore, when men accepted Him as Messiah, that He was sinless followed as a corollary. It is claimed that the origin of the conception of the " sinless " Messiah can be traced in the Old Testament. Only animals without " blemish " were used in sacrifice, and the innocent victim of Isaiah liii. suffered although " he committed no sin nor (uttered) guile with his mouth " (*v.* 9, Greek version). In 1 Peter, Christ sacrificed is compared to a lamb " unblemished and spotless " (i. 19), and in ii. 22 this very verse of Isaiah is quoted. But surely the fact suggested the quotations rather than the

quotations the fact. That the story of Jesus led the early Church to discover Isaiah liii. shows how deeply the followers of Jesus had been impressed by this among other things : that nothing that He suffered was the penalty of His own wrong-doing. He was the lamb led to the slaughter.

The Church soon became sensitive on the point—unnecessarily sensitive as it seems to us ; as when Matthew shrinks from letting Jesus say : "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God" (Mark x. 18 ; cf. Matt. xix. 17), or feels that His baptism is something that calls for explanation (Matt. iii. 14, 15). A study of the charges that some in our own time have brought against the character of Jesus, such as uncharitableness or temper in His dealings with the Pharisees, makes a fine exercise in ethical judgment. Whatever Jesus may have meant by "Why do you call me good?" in the generation that was nearest to Him historically, it does not seem to have suggested that He felt any sense of guilt or had anything but unbroken communion with God ; nor is there any trace of such a suggestion in any stratum of the Gospel records. Jesus was captain of our salvation in this sense also, that where He led there we may safely follow.

iv. 16

"Let us then draw near," so runs the refrain of this epistle, "with confidence to the throne,"

the judgment-throne which through Jesus we know to be even more gloriously a throne "of grace." There we shall find pity that issues in gracious, timely help. In the parable it was not the tax-gatherer but the Pharisee who approached the throne of God "with boldness." But the conscience-stricken, self-abasing attitude of the tax-gatherer, however it may become the newly awakened conscience, is not meant to be typical of the Christian life. "Let us through Jesus draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" might be taken as the motto not only of this epistle but of the New Testament.

v. 1–3

The author now conceived it to be his duty to show how Jesus fulfils the qualifications of the priesthood. He takes them point by point, and in the course of his exposition the argument breaks through the narrow Scriptural limits within which he is trying to work. Some of the biggest things in the priesthood of Jesus have no analogue among other priests. (1) The priest who is to represent men before God is himself a man, "clothed in weakness" as in a mantle. The Jewish priest lived his life among his people; it was as obvious to all as to himself that he had to sacrifice for his own sins as well as for theirs. Jesus too had been "taken from among men," for God had said to Him, "Thou art my Son;

to-day have I become thy Father." The author may well have known of kindly sympathetic priests ; but the picture he draws of the true priest, in his attitude to those who "go stray in ignorance" (v. 2)—a phrase reminiscent of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost son—is a picture of Jesus. (According to Jewish theology "presumptuous" sins were unforgivable ; but "presumption" and "ignorance" must surely have been understood in a wider sense than now.)

v. 4–7

(2) No priest arrogates to himself the title of priest. Only God can call a man to the priesthood, as in the priestly tradition He called Aaron (Ex. xxviii. 1). (Professor Dods quotes the heading of Anselm's letters : "Brother Anselm, monk of Bec by choice, Archbishop of Canterbury by violence.") That Jesus' priesthood was not self-sought is proved in the usual way by a Scripture quotation : "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec" ; but a far more convincing proof is the story of Gethsemane, which had made so deep an impression on the mind of the early Church. In the vivid tradition known to this writer, Jesus, "with loud outcries and with tears, offered both prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him out of death."

What does the author conceive Jesus as praying for ? Surely not for deliverance from the physical

experience of death. His prayer, whatever it was, was answered. "He was heard for His godly fear," which, as in the case of Paul's thorn in the flesh, may mean, not that He was spared the experience He dreaded, but that He learned to receive it as the Father's will for the Son (cf. Matt. xxvi. 39, 42). But to this writer that does not exhaust the answer to the prayer.

In our thought of the mystery of the Agony we are tempted to be too theological. There was enough in the immediate surroundings to explain the feeling of intolerable disappointment that was breaking Jesus' spirit. He had begun His ministry with such high hopes, on fire with the message that God's Kingdom was at the door, had in fact already arrived. To Him the radiance of the glory that was to be, filled the whole horizon; He could not understand how men preferred their own little rushlights. For Him the lustre of the precious pearl He brought outshone all other lustre; and He had tried to make men see it as He saw it. All through His work He had had no ambition but to go on, helping, forgiving, inspiring, leading men to God. And this was the end! It was not only that Jew and heathen, priest and people, official and citizen, had joined in bringing Him to death, but the consciousness that in what they did they were only "people." Let one who is the radiance of God's glory, the impress of God's essence, come among men, even

among God's chosen people ; this is how they will respond. In all this there was enough to account for the cry : " Father, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from me."

v. 8–10

(3) The priest is appointed to represent men in the things of God. How fully Jesus opened up for men the way to God the epistle will show later. (4) The priest offers vegetable and animal sacrifices for sins ; later we are to hear what Jesus offered. But this priest had qualifications for His work of which the Levitical priest had no need. Though He was a Son, He learnt suffering by obedience. The phrase was ordinarily applied to the needed chastening of an undisciplined nature ; courage was needed to apply it to Jesus. He did not from the beginning know the full bitterness of the cup He had to drink ; but as each new experience came He accepted it from the Father's hand. Thus, in one of the author's favourite phrases, He was " perfected," fully equipped, to be the high priest of sinful, suffering humanity.

v. 11–14

Next begins a section of some difficulty but of great interest, in which the author speaks as teacher ; addressing pupils who are disheartened and unresponsive, and therefore from the teacher's point of view highly unsatisfactory material. Like a wise teacher he is more concerned about the

progress of his pupils than about the consistency of his own language. Thus in v. 11 he tells them they have become "sluggish" of hearing: a few verses later he expresses the longing that a new earnestness may prevent them from becoming "sluggish" (vi. 12). He begins by saying they are too immature spiritually to take in any but the most elementary Christian teaching; then he proceeds to give them that "difficult" instruction which he has just declared to be beyond them. In parabolic form he gives a solemn warning about the fate of "fruitless" Christians (vi. 7, 8), and then assures them that their past record is a guarantee that this fate will not be theirs. Without minimising the seriousness of their present condition, their teacher recognises and even exaggerates every encouraging symptom they show.

"I have," he writes, "a good deal to say to you about the Melchizedec priesthood of Christ. It is hard for me to make my meaning clear when my pupils are so backward. It is so long since your conversion that you should now be teaching others. Far from that you ought to be sent back in disgrace to the kindergarten class to learn the A B C of Christian truth. It is milk you need, not solid food. One who is on milk diet has no skill to distinguish between right and wrong. Solid food is for grown-ups who by practice have trained their faculties to know truth from error. Yet we

must make the effort. Let us get beyond the teaching we give catechumens and pass on to a higher stage."

Those who plead for the perpetual preaching of " the simple Gospel " get no support from this Christian teacher. To him the constant preaching of elementary truth leads to intellectual laziness, which in turn issues in spiritual and moral sluggishness. In spite of his doubts about his readers' ability to follow his argument, he will make the attempt. He is quite certain in any case that this is the kind of instruction they need. They are not bad-hearted, but only down-hearted ; a new vision, a glimpse from a new angle of the Jesus they have so long known, will give them back their old martial bearing that they have so sadly lost (xii. 12).

One of the great needs of the Church to-day is patient, systematic instruction on the meaning of the Christian religion and its application to life, imparted by earnest teachers who are men of open minds, who have paid the price in thought and study for being teachers, who are not afraid of new ideas or of leading their people into new truth, even at the cost of some unpleasantness to themselves. We have plenty of preaching ; too much, some might say ; but it is of so haphazard a nature, and so much of it is just the old song to the old tune, that the result is quite incommensurate with the quantity.

## CHAPTER IX

## AN ANCIENT CREED
(vi. 1–20)

Of special interest in this passage are the two verses that mention the six points that were then regarded as the basic truths of the Christian creed. These verses have been carefully scanned to see whether they shed any light on the question whether the readers were "Hebrews" or Gentile Christians. We know from Romans i. how deeply Paul was impressed with the moral effects of polytheism. We gather from 1 Thessalonians i. 9, as indeed we should expect from the analogy of modern missionary experience, that an attack on polytheism was an element in Paul's preaching in Thessalonica. The apparent absence of any positive teaching on the nature of God such as would be given to polytheistic idolaters would strengthen the case of those who think the readers were Christian Jews; were it not for the fact that we do not know how much teaching was covered by "faith in God," and that in any case we need not suppose the creed was specially drawn up for this community.

The six items of instruction are indicated by short, pithy phrases which are really "captions," brief titles suitable for the purpose of reference or description. They tell us practically nothing of the contents of these "articles" in the creed. About these contents we can only guess; yet we are not altogether guessing in the dark. The atmosphere of this epistle is in some respects very like that of the Synoptic Gospels and the book of "Acts." In "Acts" especially there are repeated references to points of Christian instruction, which would be suitably indicated by the titles mentioned in these verses. The six captions are: "Repentance from dead works," "Faith in God," teaching of "Ablutions," of "Laying on of hands," of the "Resurrection of the dead," of "Eternal judgment." The fact that these are only titles may explain also the otherwise curious fact of the apparent absence of any direct reference to Jesus.

Evidently they go in pairs. The first two, "repentance from dead works" and "faith in God," take us back to the very beginning of the Gospel history, when Jesus preached, "Repent and have faith in the Gospel." The phrase "from dead works" may be the writer's own. In ix. 14 he uses the same phrase: "The blood of Christ will purify our conscience from dead works," where the inference has been drawn that "dead

works " are such as defile the conscience ; just as in Jewish and Hindu theology a corpse defiles anything that touches it. The real meaning, however, is shown in the words that complete the sentence : " to serve the living God." Part of our difficulty with the word " works," which occurs so often in the New Testament, is our want of an English equivalent for the Greek " erga." " Conduct " is perhaps our nearest equivalent. To this author conduct not inspired by the living God is lifeless and defiling. If Moses had stayed in Egypt he would have lived a life of " sin " (xi. 25), not necessarily a life of wickedness, but a life apart from God. He would have been an " apostate."

It is certainly striking that the second " article " is headed " faith in God " rather than " faith in Christ," though perhaps not any more striking than the absence of the name of Jesus from the " Acts " account of Paul's mission address to the Athenians (xvii. 22–31). We seem here to have a reminiscence of the preaching of Jesus of which " Have faith in God " was one of the leading motives.

The next two " articles," teaching on " ablutions " and on " the laying on of hands," are well illustrated by the story told at the beginning of Acts xix., about Paul finding at Ephesus about a dozen people who apparently were regarded as in some sense Christian, but who had been baptised only with John's baptism. After some teaching

Paul baptised them again, this time in the name of the Lord Jesus. He further "laid hands on them" and "the Holy Spirit came upon them." We gather, then, that the "article" on "the laying on of hands" would deal with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The article on "baptisms" would presumably deal with the distinction, not only between the Baptist's baptism and baptism in the name of Jesus, but with the distinction between them both and the various other "baptisms" and religious "ablutions" of the time. For example, Jewish proselytes were baptised, and "ablutions" of some kind were evidently common in the world religions of the time, as they are still. The importance of ritual ablutions in Hindu ceremonial accounts for the fact that Hindu temples are so often found beside lakes or on the banks of rivers. Indeed the word used by the author here is not the regular word for Christian baptism (*baptisma*), but the word for ablutions or washings (*baptismos*). On the only occasion on which the word is used in the Gospels it refers to the ritual washing of kitchen utensils. If one could be quite sure that we are here in contact with the unadulterated tradition of Jesus' teaching, we might with some certainty assume that the article referred not to baptism at all, but to the uselessness of the elaborate precautions taken to ensure ceremonial "cleanness."

Again, when Jesus "laid on hands" it was with the kindly touch of healing or of blessing. "He laid hands on each one of them and healed them" (Luke iv. 40). "He took them in His arms and blessed them fervently, laying hands upon them" (Mark x. 16). "And stretching out His hand He touched him, saying, 'I will, be thou cleansed'" (Matt. viii. 3). Jesus' custom of giving the touch of benediction was no doubt one reason for the continuance in the Christian Church of the ceremonial laying on of hands, which, as has been suggested, may have originally signified the transference of power from father to son or from prophet to disciple, or the identification of the worshipper with his sacrifice. At all events the custom was evidently from an early date, often no doubt with more than a touch of superstition, associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The two last articles, "the resurrection of the dead" and "eternal judgment," are illustrated in Peter's address to Cornelius and his friends and the subsequent story (Acts x. 40ff.). In this passage reference is made to the resurrection of Jesus, and to Jesus as judge of the living and the dead, as well as to faith in Jesus, remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit and baptism. In Acts i. 22 the resurrection of Jesus is spoken of, almost as if the proclamation of it were the whole work of an apostle. One of the subjects of Paul's testimony before Felix was the future judgment

(Acts xxiv. 25). In 1 Corinthians xv. 3ff. it is possible that we have something like the exact words of the article on the resurrection ; for Paul is evidently here handing on traditional elementary Church teaching.

In this list of fundamentals the absence is noticeable of any reference to the other item of traditional elementary Christian teaching to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians, viz. the Lord's Supper (xi. 23ff.). It is a little difficult to take seriously the suggestion that the omission is due to the fact that the Lord's Supper was a secret cult meal of the Church. Perhaps it is rather to be classed with other phenomena which suggest that in this document we are in touch with a peculiarly unecclesiastical and non-sacerdotal type of Christianity ; such are the absence of all mention of Church officials and of any certain reference to baptism. It is however very possible to exaggerate the force of the argument from silence. In Paul's most elaborate writing, the epistle to the Romans, baptism is mentioned only once and the Lord's Supper not at all. In " Hebrews " itself the resurrection of Jesus, which is assumed throughout, is directly mentioned only once (xiii. 20).

If we cannot fill in all the details of the six " articles " we can at least get the general conception of the Christian religion held before the minds of catechumens in the Church to which this epistle is directed. Christians were men called

to a new way of life, which could be lived only by faith in God ; men who, by being baptised in the name of Jesus, had publicly declared their allegiance to Him ; whose life had been quickened and enriched by a new access of spiritual power ; whose life was not limited by the death of the body, and who were delivered from all forms of pettiness by their assurance that their lives were deciding their immortal destiny.

vi. 4, 5

That this is something like the conception in the author's mind is clear from the next section in which he gives his own characterisation of Christians. Every phrase suggests that same thrill as of a new revelation, of the heavens opened, of life lifted on to new levels, that we get in the Gospels and in "Acts." In spite of the six "articles" of the faith, to be a Christian is not to be able to pass an examination in a creed. It is to have received "illumination." (We think of Jesus' saying : "I am the light of the world" (John viii. 12) ; still more of "Ye are the light of the world" in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 14) ; of what the writer to the Ephesians calls "the illuminated eyes of the heart" (i. 18). Later "illumination" became a technical term for baptism.)

They have tasted the heavenly gift, been initiated into experiences hitherto undreamed of ; have become participators in the Holy Spirit, in His

gifts such as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians xii. ; have been led to the discovery and the exercise of unsuspected latent capacities in themselves ; they have tasted the revelation of God how good it is, with a wonder even greater than that of the psalmist who had sung "Taste and see that Jehovah is good" (Psa. xxxiv. 8). They have not indeed seen the glory of God revealed without restraint or limitation in all the glory that is to be ; but they have, as it were, experienced the working of the advance-guard of the forces of the kingdom, that are at work even in this age (1 Cor. xii. 28).

vi. 6–8

The readers had not been able to live at this high level. It is the anxious care of their teacher that their drooping faith should be revived. He feels that this will happen if only they can be made to see the vision as he sees it. For most of us too the illumination of our soul must be the reflected light from that which God has given some seer. Here there is a special reason for the glowing description of the first days of the Christian life. The author believes that if those who have once known the thrill of Christian joys afterwards fall away, their doom is sealed. For them a second repentance is impossible. Nor is this with him a passing mood of despondency. Twice he returns to the subject (x. 26ff., xii. 17). Both times he is as certain as he is here that he

who flings away his birthright flings it away for ever. These verses have in large measure formed the battleground between those who maintained and those who denied the possibility of a second repentance.

To get the author's point of view we have to remember that here, as elsewhere throughout the New Testament, we are in the atmosphere of a mission Church, whose members are surrounded by non-Christians, continually on the watch. We read these sentences, not as an eternal decree of God uttered through this writer as God's mouthpiece, but as the judgment of a mature Christian thinker and teacher on a point of great importance in religious psychology, a judgment moreover based on experience as well as theory. It is not only that the spiritual and emotional accompaniments of conversion, as he has just described them, are of a nature which cannot be repeated; if we abandon our loyalty, in the nature of the case we abandon it for good.

But besides this subjective consideration, for a Christian in a mission Church to go back on his profession is for all practical purposes to declare to the "heathen" and Jewish neighbours that the claims made by and for Jesus were false; it is to side with the enemies of Jesus. The disloyal take part in the crucifixion of Jesus in so far as it is possible for them to do so. The men of whom the author is thinking have, by deliberate, open apostasy,

put Jesus out of their lives, and so with their own hands shut for ever the door of hope.

Paul, who had presumably a far wider experience of mission work than the author of "To the Hebrews," does not take such despondent views. In his pæan of praise to God at the end of Romans viii. nothing can separate the Christian from God's love revealed in Christ Jesus, though it is true Paul does not raise the question whether the Christian's own apostasy may do what no external enemy can do. In 1 Corinthians ix. 27, where Paul tells us of his life-and-death struggle with his "body," he certainly contemplates the possibility that even a great and successful preacher like himself may not be found genuine at the judgment, but the question of the possibility of a second repentance is not in his mind. In the case of the Corinthian Christian who was guilty of incest, Paul apparently thinks that death is the best thing that can happen to him physically, but he does not despair of his ultimate salvation (1 Cor. v. 4f.). Christians who desecrate the Lord's table suffer illness or even death, but no worse fate (1 Cor. xi. 30ff.).

An appeal to missionaries of to-day for their experience on the point would doubtless elicit various answers. One has known a convert from Hinduism who, on the very day after his baptism, under pressure from his Hindu relatives, renounced his profession of the Christian faith and went back into caste. For many years he lived in caste;

yet he attended Church regularly, subscribed to the Church funds, and found his friends among Christians ; to none of which has the Hindu any strenuous objections so long as one abides by the caste regulations. As far as was possible within caste restrictions he lived the Christian life, and finally, in another part of the country, he was publicly received back into the Church. In spite however of solitary examples like that, perhaps most missionaries would agree that no one is so impervious to spiritual impulses as the man who in youth was powerfully attracted by the Christian appeal but finally said "No." They find with the author of 1 John that there is a degree of apostasy so hopeless as to render even prayer nugatory (v. 16).

vi. 9–12

This section concludes with a parable that looks like a confused reminiscence of the parable of the tares among the wheat. It leaves us with the words ringing in our ears that announce the doom of the field that God has blessed, if it gives no return : "rejected," "accursed," "destined for the fire." The pastor will not and cannot contemplate the possibility of such a fate for his "beloved" flock (an adjective he applies to them only here in the epistle). Even if they are to be judged strictly by their fruits, they need not go empty-handed to the trial. As yet the author only hints at the services which right up till the present

his readers have rendered to the "saints" (a Pauline term for Christians which he here employs contrary to his usual practice). We note that, as in Paul's letters, we are still at the stage when the Church is everywhere a small body fighting with its back to the wall, so that kindness to the "saints" is an even more urgent duty than to play the Samaritan to the "outsiders."

What troubles this teacher about his pupils is not any failure on their part to make clear on which side they stand, or any want of costly loyalty to their fellow-Christians. He would like to see them more anxious about themselves, more eager to avoid spiritual slackness, more in earnest to keep the cup of their Christian hope full till the end. Nowadays we are assured on all hands that concern for one's own salvation is out of date. It is true that there is a kind of self-centred interest in one's own "salvation" that is as far from the spirit as from the practice of the New Testament. Yet the New Testament never gets so far out of touch with life as we sometimes do when we try to speak a spiritual language that we have learned only by rote. Paul never hesitated to urge his converts to the most serious concern about their own spiritual welfare. Some of Jesus' most memorable sayings are concerned with the duty of sleepless vigilance, and would be pointless if our own spiritual danger were a matter of no moment to us. Parable after parable of Jesus assumes that

the individual who is not spiritually blind will want not only that the world should find God, but that he himself should find God. The call is not that we should ignore ourselves but that we should lose ourselves, and even then the goal is that we should find ourselves.

vi. 13–20

The author will assure his readers that if they cannot fully trust God at least the fault is not God's. In spite of the handicap of his method of "proof" by Alexandrian Scripture exegesis, he contrives to make an effective point. How do we know that we can trust God? Among men, he replies, an oath by a higher power is an absolute guarantee of fidelity. There is no higher power than God, and so God has sworn "by Himself"; which means that there are ultimate truths, truths that lie in the very nature of God Himself; though it is not given to all to know them. The pure in heart shall see the purity of God, and the faithful shall know God's faithfulness.

The promise to which God bound Himself by an oath was that He would multiply Abraham's seed as the stars and as the sand of the seashore. The promise had been given at the moment when Abraham had been willing, at what he conceived to be the command of God, to destroy the son, the son that had been given him beyond his hopes, and through whom alone, as it seemed, God's purpose could be worked out. On the strength of

this assurance, writer and readers alike, fleeing from the wrath to come, fleeing from despair and their own faithlessness, may with stout hearts lay hold of the Hope set before them ; for to this writer as to Paul the Christian Faith is also the Christian hope, the Christian certainty.

We have an anchor of the soul then—an anchor that will " neither break nor drag." [1] This anchor is no text of Scripture, no beautiful phantasy of some pious soul in the long ago. Beneath the strange theory of inspiration and the fanciful interpretation of Scripture, we have in this passage a piece of splendid insight and faith. The author trusted God, not, as he almost tries to persuade himself, on account of some " vow " God was supposed to have made in the dim past. He trusted God, partly because he saw the guiding hand of the good God in all the history of Israel ; partly because in Jesus Christ he had seen God's radiant glory ; because also his intuition told him that in the spread of the Church God's ancient plan was working itself out to its consummation. The mustard seed was springing up and becoming a great plant with far-spreading branches. That was the magnificent faith that inspired this writer and many like-minded with him in that day, ludicrous as the claim must have seemed to the men of the world, to those of them indeed who knew or thought anything of the matter.

[1] Weymouth's translation.

They had an anchor then that held (vi. 19). By a curious metaphor the anchor is represented as going behind the veil that hid the Holy of Holies ; in other words their souls were anchored to the eternal realities. When the high priest went behind the veil he was no forerunner ; the people were forbidden to follow. When Jesus opened up for us the way to God, He repeated His familiar call : " Follow me " ; " that where I am there ye may be also." He was no Levite but a true high priest, an eternal Melchizedec high priest. Thus after this long word of warning and consolation, by the adroit reference to the " veil," the writer brings us back to the point he had reached in v. 10. He is now ready to begin in earnest the discussion of the subject he has had in mind all through : the Melchizedec high-priesthood of Jesus.

## CHAPTER X

## A NEW KIND OF PRIEST
(vii. 1–28)

The author has now reached his central theme, the high-priesthood of Jesus. He is about to show that Jesus' offering of Himself is the reality of which the Old Testament sacrificial ritual, especially the ceremonial of the Day of Atonement, was only the faint foreshadowing. We expect him therefore to try to demonstrate that the Aaronic high priest imperfectly prefigured Jesus. This however he shrinks from doing ; for reasons which we can easily understand.

The Old Testament speaks with two voices on the subject of animal sacrifice and its validity. The two views of sacrifice, which seem to us irreconcileable, are admirably represented in the closing verses in Psalm li. In verses 16 and 17 we read : "For thou delightest not in sacrifice ; else would I give it ; thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." In the next two verses we seem to be in another atmosphere. "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion ; build thou

the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering ; then shall they offer bullocks on thine altar." The last verse at least is most easily explained as an addition by one who was shocked at the low estimate of sacrifice expressed in the previous verses. At all events in the Old Testament the sacrificial system is exalted and revered on the one hand, despised and ridiculed on the other.

The view of Scripture held by the author of this epistle does not permit him, with many of the finest minds in Israel, simply to regard the wholesale religious slaughter of animals as a tragic misunderstanding of the mind of God. Superficially indeed all through he seems to be finding a deep significance in the sacrificial ritual, especially that of the Day of Atonement. Yet the nearest approach he makes to finding in it any real efficacy is his grudging admission that " the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on defiled persons sanctifies to the extent of producing physical (i.e. ceremonial) cleanness " (ix. 13). In the same sentence this ineffective effectiveness is set in the strongest contrast with the power of the sacrifice of Christ to cleanse the conscience.

All the author's instincts seem to lead him, almost unconsciously to himself, to sympathise with the prophetic depreciation rather than with the priestly exaltation of sacrifice and ritual. For

the priests he has not a good word to say. The section in which he deals with them is an excellent illustration of the effect which the whole "weak and useless" (vii. 18) priestly system made on the minds of men spiritually sensitive. The priests were appointed by a law that dealt only with externals (vii. 16); their qualifications were purely physical (vii. 14; Neh. vii. 63ff.); they sinned like the rest of us (vii. 27) and died like the rest of us (vii. 23), and at best their profession had an unpleasant resemblance to that of a butcher (ix. 12).

Using the Old Testament phraseology so convincing to him and his readers, he finds two other weaknesses fatal to the effectiveness of the Levitical priests. God swore no oath at their appointment (vii. 20) (suggesting apparently that God did not mean their appointment to be taken very seriously), and the tabernacle in which they served was "hand-made" (ix. 11), that is, their whole work was concerned with physical and earthly things, not with eternal realities. Whatever we think of the individual counts in this indictment of the Levitical priesthood, the author is right at least in his main contention. If ever pious souls in Israel had sought and found forgiveness and communion with God, as many of them did, it was not through the medium of the sacrificial shambles. The priesthood failed when tested by its ability to perform the function of all priesthood. It could not quiet the troubled conscience (ix. 9), nor secure the

approach of the worshipper to God. Far from the priest being able to say : "Let us draw near to God," he himself was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies only once a year, and that with elaborate precautions as to ritual cleanness. The whole ceremonial was so arranged that the people were made to feel that between them and their God there was a great gulf fixed, the gulf of their own sin, which nothing, not even the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, could bridge.

From the author's point of view the Levitical high priest had one more disability. Lofty as his position was, yet at least in the early days which he has chiefly in mind, he was only a subordinate. It is true that in Numbers xxxiv. 17 and Joshua xiv. 1, the high priest Eleazar is bracketed with, and even takes precedence of, the prince of the tribes, Joshua the son of Nun. Still the priest was not the prince. While the priesthood of Jesus is central in this epistle, it does not follow that it was central in the mind of the writer. In the first chapter he makes it clear that the priesthood of Jesus is only one of his functions ; the priest is also king. He has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High (i. 3) and His throne is for ever (i. 8).

If we ask why the author did not lay more stress on the kingship of Jesus, this is only part of the general question why the first generations of Christians did not lay more stress on it. That they did make some use of the title is evident from

such a passage as Acts xvii. 7, where Paul and his friends are accused of treason on the ground that they acknowledge another king, called Jesus. We must not dismiss too lightly the suggestion that it was fear of this very treason charge that led the early Christians to be chary of emphasising the kingship of Jesus. The claim to be "King of the Jews" was the effective charge on which Jesus was condemned.

Nor need we accuse the Christians of any degree of cowardice or even of excessive prudence if this was the restraining motive. It may not be quite true to say that Jesus died for a metaphor; yet every Christian recognised that, though Jesus was king, His kingdom was not of this world. Nevertheless everyone who became a follower of Jesus had thenceforth a double loyalty, as the heads of the Jewish Church learnt when they sought to compel the Christians absolutely to refrain from speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus (Acts iv. 18), as the Roman Government was to learn later when they tried to make the Christians worship the emperor.

In his study of the sacrificial system the author makes no enquiry such as a modern writer would make into the primitive ideas that underlie the strange supposition that the slaughter of unwilling and inoffensive animals somehow affected man's relation to God. It was enough for him that the sacrificial system was ordained in Scripture. The

marvel is that, believing, as his theory of Scripture compelled him to believe, that God was in some way responsible for the institution of animal sacrifice, he yet saw so clearly the ineffectiveness of the system ; and that, obliged as he thought he was to interpret the death of Christ through the category of animal sacrifice, he yet reached so lofty and spiritual a conception of the meaning of that death, and in such large measure escaped the degrading theories of the Atonement which in the minds of multitudes have distorted the picture of the God, who is the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There may well have been another reason why the author hesitated to find in the Levitical high priest a prototype of Jesus. " In the days of His flesh " Jesus had come in contact with the priests of His time and had said His say about them. It must have been with the connivance of the priests that the temple had been turned into a bird- and cattle-market ; and in a scene which may well have contributed forcibly to the final tragedy Jesus in true prophetic vein denounced the sacrilege. A priest and a Levite had been pilloried for all time in a parable which is with one exception the most gracious of all the parables of Jesus. If the priests had not greatly interfered with Jesus in the earlier days of His ministry, they had played a decisive part in its closing days ; and after His death, as the Acts of the Apostles tells us, the persecution of His followers was largely conducted,

or inspired and directed, by the priests. It would only be human nature if a Christian of the first century found the priesthood a counterfoil to, rather than a parabolic foreshadowing of, Jesus.

We see the author then, anxious to exhibit Jesus as the great high priest, necessitated by his view of Scripture to find in the Old Testament an analogue for the high-priesthood of Jesus, yet repelled by the idea that the official priests of the chosen people were in any sense forerunners of Jesus. It was not the first time in Jewish history a somewhat similar problem had arisen. There was a memorable precedent in the days of the Maccabees. Jonathan had greatly strengthened his position as leader of the Jews by his appointment as high priest, which he received in 152 B.C. from the Syrian prince Alexander Balas ; but the first of the Maccabees to be made high priest with the sanction of his own countrymen was Jonathan's brother Simon. At an assembly held in 141 B.C. he was formally recognised as holder of the combined offices of Prince and High Priest.

But how could one who was not of the house of David be prince, and how could one who was not of the house of Eleazar be high priest? The mysterious Melchizedec (Gen. xiv. 18ff.), king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who came none knew whence and went none knew whither, seemed to provide a heaven-sent precedent, as the story of one who was neither of royal nor priestly

lineage, and yet was both king and priest. According to a tempting suggestion Psalm cx. was composed at this time in the form of a divine oracle by an enthusiastic supporter of the Maccabees, who was convinced that Simon was the God-appointed king and priest of the Jews. (The credit for discovering that the initial letters of the lines beginning "Sit thou" form an acrostic on the word Simon has been ascribed to Bickell.)

The way was thus opened for the writer "to the Hebrews," and he makes full use of the Melchizedec story in "Genesis" and of the oracle based on it in Psalm cx. Philo and the later Jewish literature refer to Melchizedec, and we need not suppose that the fascination of this mysterious personage was first felt in the age of the Maccabees; but the use made of it by the author of "Hebrews" seems to be all his own, and apparently he alone suggested that Melchizedec was superior to Abraham. We note also that, as soon as he has scored his point of showing that the Levitical priesthood was a pitiful substitute for the true priesthood typified in Melchizedec, he makes no further reference to this figure, whose impressiveness is so largely due to the mists that hide him from us.

vii. 1, 2

Rendel Harris seems to have established that the early Christians used an "onomastikon," that is, a book giving the interpretation of names. The

author finds the significance of Melchizedec the priest king in the first place in his names. Melchizedec he interprets as "king of righteousness" (Peake thinks the name really meant "My Lord is Ṣidiq," the latter being the name of a deity). "Salem" he translates "Peace." Thus for him Melchizedec embodied two of the qualities most closely associated in prophecy with the Messianic kingdom, righteousness and peace. "His name shall be called . . . Prince of Peace . . . to uphold" the kingdom of David "with righteousness" (Isa. ix. 6, 7). "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace . . ." (Rom. xiv. 17). The title "Most High God" also, being frequently used by Gentiles (cf. Acts xvi. 17), may have been intended to suggest that this priest-king did not belong to Abraham's race at all.

vii. 3

Then we have a piece of true Alexandrian exegesis. In the Genesis story nothing is said of Melchizedec's father, mother, genealogy, birth, or death; therefore he had no father, mother, or genealogy, was not born and did not die, but was made like the (eternal) Son of God. Thus the author reaches one of his main points: the Melchizedec priesthood is an abiding priesthood, not circumscribed by birth and death.

At first sight it is a little difficult to know just what to make of all this. It was natural that

Jewish readers should be puzzled by the introduction, without hint of his parentage or ancestry, of a character so strange as Melchizedec, in a book so interested in genealogies as "Genesis." Apparently Genesis xiv. does not belong to the priestly document which revels in genealogical information, but this author could not be expected to be aware of that. He himself seems to suggest that his account is not to be taken too literally; for when he says that Melchizedec abides a priest permanently, he can hardly mean that he has a permanent priesthood alongside that of Jesus. Is not the truth that we are here in contact with a species of literature, once familiar and intelligible enough, but now difficult to understand because we no longer write in that way? The ethics of the novel, a form of literature in which imaginary events are described without intent to deceive, the value of which is even judged by its fidelity to "truth," has been equally puzzling to many in our own day.

vii. 4–10

The author makes yet other claims for Melchizedec. He and not Abraham is the fountain-head of the grace and power of the Jewish race. Authority over a people is shown in two ways: the privilege of blessing, the power of taxation. In the Melchizedec story it was Melchizedec who blessed Abraham, that too at the one moment in the history of Abraham when he appeared in the

guise of a military conqueror. Further, the right of taxation, or of exacting tithes, was the prerogative of the Levites. But Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedec, and that not at the behest of any law but of his own free will. Thus " in a sense " (vii. 9 ; a hint that the sentence must be read in the figurative sense in which it is written) Abraham's unborn descendant Levi and all his tribe paid tithes to Melchizedec. The Jews acknowledged Abraham as their father ; Abraham acknowledged Melchizedec as his priest and king ; and Melchizedec's authority lay only in his obvious and acknowledged personal dignity.

vii. 11–28

The Levitical priesthood then was a degenerate usurper. As Psalm cx. declared, the true priest is of the type of Melchizedec. But in the new order far more is involved than a mere change of priest. The character of the priesthood determines the whole legal economy of the nation, or as we should say, the institutions of society rest ultimately on a religious basis. A people cannot change its religion without the change reverberating through every department of its life—legal, political, educational, industrial, and social. The point is of great interest at the present moment in connection with the charge of " denationalisation " so often brought against Christian missions. The accusation is often denied by missionaries, perhaps with some justification so long as the controversy concerns

more or less superficial habits in food, clothing, and manners. It is best to acknowledge frankly that Christianity has failed in so far as it has not transformed the national life of every people it touches.

In spite, then, of the apparent remoteness from us both of his points and of his arguments, this writer is dealing with problems of living interest, dealing with them far more effectively than might at first sight appear. By ways that seem to us tortuous he has reached the truth emphasised by Jesus and by Paul, so familiar to us now however little we may apply it in our lives, but once so revolutionary. In the spiritual world we do not count descent from father to son ; he is a true Jew who is one inwardly. The only " order " that is " valid " in God's sight is the " order " of the pure in heart. For the Christian priesthood the qualifications are God's call, victorious goodness and helpful sympathy. In the things of the spirit there is no kingship but that which wins our spontaneous loyalty, no priesthood but that which even an Abraham will instinctively acknowledge ; and apostolical succession is not from hand to head but from spirit to spirit.

It is interesting to compare the treatment of the Law by this writer, by the apostle Paul, and by our Lord. All three find it " weak and ineffective " : Paul, because of man's incurable tendency to break the law ; this writer because of the proved inability

of the Law to discharge any of the obligations laid upon it. In criticising the Law our Lord used none of the laboured arguments of either writer. He drew a lightning sketch, a grimly humorous caricature of a Pharisee at prayer. There for all time are graphically depicted the " weakness and ineffectiveness " of a legal system of righteousness.

Like so much of the New Testament this chapter is a tribute to the overwhelming impression made by Jesus on the first generations of Christians. It is not the conclusion of a process of theological reasoning, nor is it the repetition of a stereotyped formula, but the outpouring of a great heart, of one who has experienced the glad deliverance and felt the new power. Through the unfamiliar processes of the argument one can feel the author's joy that Jesus is king and priest after the order of Melchizedec, one whose ministry is not subject to the changes and chances, rather the fatal certainties of our mortal lives, one who has become our high priest by no legal appointment but by the power of His own indissoluble life.

There is one sentence here in which every phrase is a sermon. " Since none can displace Him, He is able, to save indeed, without limit, those who approach God, through Him, since He lives, for ever, to intercede for them " (vii. 25). Whatever else His intercession for them means, it removes all that hinders their approach to God.

## CHAPTER XI

## IN THE SPIRIT OF THE ETERNAL
(viii. 1–ix. 28)

viii. 1–5

THE argument is now advanced a stage. "Now to crown our present discourse," as the opening phrase of chapter viii. has been translated. The author has shown that our high priest does not stand as the Levitical priest stood at his daily work. He has sat down as one whose work is finished, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High as one who is king as well as priest. Now every priest must have a sanctuary. The sanctuary of our high priest is no earthly symbolic tabernacle, but the real heavenly tabernacle ; no man-made imitation but the handiwork of God. We are here in the realm of ideas current in Alexandrian Judaism, based on the Platonic philosophy, and suggested in the phrase that this writer quotes from God's instructions to Moses (Exod. xxv. 40) : "See that thou make all things according to the pattern shown thee on the mount." The things of our daily lives are fleeting, imperfect, unsatisfying ; but they are only shadowy copies of the real things which eye

has not seen nor ear heard. Our best endeavours in any line are but attempts to recapture the vision that God has tried to give us. On this philosophy all the appurtenances of worship were feeble imitations of the realities in the mind of God, which hitherto have been known only to God but now are revealed in Jesus. His ministry is conducted in the true sanctuary, in the presence of God.

A priest further must have something to offer ; but the author will return to this subject, which he has already touched (vii. 27). Incidentally he makes the suggestive remark that if Jesus were on earth He would not be a priest at all. The priests had in fact made it clear that in their judgment there was no place for Him on earth, much less in their own number.

viii. 6–11

Now the author approaches his new point. God had arranged a rest for His people : they failed to enter in, but the rest remains ; He gives them ANOTHER DAY. The Levitical priesthood has been playing with shadows ; God has given us a NEW PRIEST, a priest who deals with realities. The Sinai covenant has broken down ; it imposed on us laws which, constituted as we are, we could not keep : God is giving us a NEW COVENANT.

The New Covenant is a phrase which this writer borrows from " Jeremiah," and in using which he shows prophetic instinct. When the commonly

recognised Christian Scriptures came to be regarded as a unity, and a name was required for the collection, the phrase adopted by common consent was the New Covenant, or, in the form better known to us through the influence of Latin translations, the New Testament. Already in the sixth decade of the first century Paul could speak to the Corinthians of the Old Covenant (Testament) (2 Cor. iii. 14). Long before this the phrase "the New Covenant" had already the most sacred associations for Christians. At the Last Supper Jesus had said: "This is my covenant blood," and according to the accounts in Luke's Gospel and in 1 Corinthians had used the very words "the New Covenant."

The author's special interest in the "Jeremiah" quotation is in its concluding reference to the forgiveness of sins (Heb. x. 17f.); yet it is hardly credible that he quotes the whole passage simply for the sake of its final words. Rather in the extended quotation we seem to see the author stretching out his hands across the ages to a kindred spirit, to one who had as little interest as himself in the sacramental emblems, who had pioneered on the road to the great conception of the individual's unhindered access to God.

In Josiah's time a law book (presumably some shorter form of our "Deuteronomy") had been found in the temple. For a time the enthusiasm created by the discovery of this "message from

God" created a kind of reformation. Soon however it became clear that no code of laws, whether the few simple precepts of an earlier age cut in stone or laws in the more elaborate, reasoned and hortatory form that we find in "Deuteronomy," could change the human heart. With that fatal tendency to circumscribe God that seems to be part of the human heritage, the people listened to those who repeated the parrot-cry : "The Temple of Jehovah," "The Temple of Jehovah" (Jer. vii. 4), and taught them that there was salvation in stone and lime however foul their lives. They thought their mere possession of the written law of Jehovah was a passport to God's favour (Jer. viii. 8).

It was then that Jeremiah was inspired to one of the loftiest flights of pre-Christian prophecy (xxxi. 31–34). Even the Old Covenant, he reminded his people, was a covenant of grace. It commemorated the day when God took Israel by the hand, as a father takes the hand of his little child, to lead him out of Egypt. The covenant failed ; the Israelites were disobedient to it. Yet Jeremiah suggests, and the writer to the "Hebrews" frankly says (viii. 7), that the fault was not altogether with the people ; it was, in part at least, with the covenant, with the whole conception of morality as obedience to a written law. God, so to speak, promotes His backward pupils to a higher class in their moral and spiritual education. They are now to be transferred from the sphere

where obedience means unintelligent or reluctant yielding to "Do this," "Do not do that," to the sphere where it means the glad response of one's whole being to the will of God, which we recognise as seeking our welfare.

It is true that when we examine Jeremiah's oracle he seems at first sight to proclaim no new kind of religion, nor even of law; only that the old laws, instead of being written on stone tablets or on any scroll, shall be written on the human heart. It has even been suggested that the passage was not written by Jeremiah at all but by some law enthusiast whose ideal it was that every man should know the law by heart. We may indeed freely grant that, even with all the prophetic insight revealed in this passage, Jeremiah is groping for the light rather than rejoicing in it. He has not yet realised that the trouble lies deeper than in our conception of law. So long as we think of God as our law-giver at all, so long will our response to God be lacking in spontaneity. Only when we enter into our inheritance as sons of God, and come to Him as children to a Father, shall we enjoy that liberty in God that only sons can know.

We note too in Jeremiah's oracle the failure to recognise that it is not enough to know the will of God; he was feeling after an experience that the first generation of Christians was to know in such rich abundance, the new spiritual capacity that comes from the striking off of the shackles,

what the apostle Paul calls "power." The word "covenant" in fact imperfectly expresses what both writers have in mind. It is not a bargain between two parties on equal terms. In this covenant the gracious God is making an approach to men, seeking to win them to Himself; yet it is two-sided at least in this sense, that if God is to be our God we must be His people.

Further, in the last resort, every man must seek and find God for himself. Prophet, priest, and teacher; temple, ritual, and sacrament; these may all have a part to play in religious education; yet the help that any man or any institution can give us in our spiritual lives is strictly limited. In particular the priest whose function it is to bring us to God too often becomes an obstacle that blocks our pathway to God. If we are correct in our interpretation of the mind of the writer "to the Hebrews," this part of Jeremiah's oracle must have made a special appeal to him. He leaves us to draw our own inferences; but for those who have followed his exposition of the high-priesthood of Jesus, a human Christian priest is a contradiction in terms. "Teachers" and "leaders" we have and need; but the priest who professes to represent us before God, or to mediate God's forgiveness to us, is trying to undo what Jesus did so effectively once for all; is taking us back to the old feeble and useless Levitical priesthood.

viii. 12, 13

The closing words of the oracle fit exactly into the thought of this author. If man is ever to have fellowship with God it can never be on the basis that he keeps God's law ; but only because God, knowing our frailty, is willing to forgive. As Jesus put it long afterwards, it is the rebellion in the son's heart that drives him away from the Father. When the rebel heart is broken and repentant, the Father's arms are waiting, the door of the home is open wide. Well may this author say that from the days of Jeremiah the days of the Old Covenant are numbered.

ix. 1–28

The author now elaborates a comparison and contrast between the two covenants, the sanctuary of the Old and the sanctuary of the New, the priest of the Old and the priest of the New, the ritual too of the two covenants (ix. 1–5). In describing the furniture of the tabernacle it may be that the author displays a certain impatience with the dreary catalogue, " about which I cannot at present speak in detail " (ix. 5). Probably however, as we should expect in so careful a document, each item has its significance ; the manna for example being a reminder of the faithlessness of the Israelites and the kindly way in which God dealt with it ; Aaron's Rod recalling the Divine choice that expressly reserved Divine prerogatives for the tribe of Levi,

and the small winged things that represented the Divine presence, the Cherubim of the Glory, forming a striking foil to the Glory known to this writer and his friends as representing the Majesty on High.

One of his points he makes by taking advantage of the ambiguity of the Greek word "diathēkē." By this word he usually means "covenant," but in ix. 16, 17 he uses it in the sense of "will" or "testament," thus being enabled to associate the death of Jesus with the inauguration of the new era. For this idea he had the authority of Jesus Himself, who, as reported by Luke, had said: "As my Father bequeathed to me a kingdom, so I bequeath to you to eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (xxii. 30), where the word for "bequeath" is the verb of this noun "diathēkē."

In the last two verses of chapter ix. the author completes in a striking way the contrast between the two rituals (ix. 27f.). Perhaps the expectation of a speedy return of Jesus hardly harmonises with his general outlook, but it was part of the common heritage of the Church. In the days of the Old Covenant, when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies the people waited with eager expectation till the veil parted once more and he emerged; symbol to the people that their covenant with God still stood and that such forgiveness as the ritual could bestow for the sins of the past year was theirs. Yet it was a very chastened satisfaction

that they found ; they knew it would all have to be done again and again through countless years.

When Jesus entered the Most Holy Place He entered for the first and the last time. His death could not be repeated and need not be repeated. His people wait for His return as the Israelites waited for the return of their high priest ; and some day He will come, not for judgment but bringing salvation to His waiting people. He came the first time to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (ix. 26) ; He will come the second time with no reference to sin (ix. 28). That chapter of His history is ended.

Throughout this chapter (ix.) once more we find the author struggling to express what Jesus has been to him and to those who have passed through an experience like this ; perhaps on the whole limited by the compulsion he feels to find in the Levitical ritual the categories with which to formulate his experience ; yet using this ritual as an admirable counterfoil to the work of Jesus, which he expounds with great power, and in language which has become, to use his own phrase, part of the " undying heritage " of the Church.

In setting forth what Jesus had been to himself and his friends, perhaps like Paul he was straitened by the attitude of Jesus to the Jewish Law. In effect Jesus dealt the Torah its death-blow. If any part of it passed over into the Christian Church it was not because it was found written in the

Old Testament, but because it was part of the universal Law that God has engraven on the hearts of men. But Jesus seems never to have directly attacked the Law ; He went to work in another way. By carrying the attention back from act to motive and from conduct to the hidden life ; by distinguishing between ritual and moral while treating even the ritual with respect ; by recognising that the Written Law contained temporary concessions to the grim facts of human nature, and finally, by treating the whole Torah as but a stage in the spiritual education of the race, Jesus in fact undermined the whole system.

Yet it was all done so quietly and so implicitly that it was possible for the less penetrating to maintain that it had not been done at all. Even in the Sermon on the Mount as we have it, after the genuine and characteristic word of Jesus, " I have not come to destroy but to fulfil," there is the solemn assertion : " For verily I tell you, till heaven and earth pass, no dot of an *i* or stroke of a *t* shall pass from the Law till all be fulfilled." Surely Jesus never said that, yet it was possible for the sentence to get into the record. Paul felt he had been slain by the Law, yet the commandment was " holy, and righteous, and beneficent." He never seems fully to have appreciated the distinction that seems to us so obvious between ritual and moral. For the Christian the Law, the whole system, had come to an end on the Cross.

"Everything is now allowable." But Paul soon learnt that this is a dangerous doctrine to preach among uninstructed people with fierce passions. He had in fact soon to begin building up what seems singularly like a new Law, albeit a Law that leaves a large place for individual liberty guided by Christian love.

Speaking generally, when Paul spoke of the Law he had in mind the ethical parts of the system. That left the very extensive ritual requirements untouched. One of the striking things in the Gospels is the almost complete absence of any reference, hostile or otherwise, to the sacrificial system. It is incredible that Jesus can have felt any sympathy with the type of piety that expressed itself in the slaughter of animals; but for whatever reason He does not seem to have been brought into open conflict with the system. This may be in part due to the fact that the sacrifices were offered only in the temple and consequently played no part in the ordinary life of Galilee. It is at least striking that the sacrificial system is not a count in the terrible indictment of external religion in Matthew xxiii., and that at the "cleansing" of the Temple it was the arrangement for the sale of the animals, not the fact of their slaughter, that Jesus attacked.

Again, in the Sermon on the Mount, while emphasising that God looks not at the gift but at the giver, Jesus seems at least to speak of the

sacrificial system without disparagement (Matt. v. 23f.), and in Matthew xxiii. 18ff. He seems to show a truly Jewish reverence for the altar. At all events it is easy to see that for the early Church, to which the Old Testament was "Scripture," there was a problem to be solved: What about the ritual law? It is to this problem, in one important aspect of it, that the writer "to the Hebrews" addresses himself.

Two ways were open to him. He might spiritualise the ritual regulations, in the way with which we have since become familiar. He chooses however another exit from the difficulty; he treats the ritual partly as a parable, partly as a prophecy. The Holy Spirit, who inspires Scripture, teaches not only by word and story but by the institutions of the Old Covenant. In the very construction of the tabernacle, He teaches, with its forecourt and mysterious Most Holy Place, there is the lesson that until the Christ comes the way to God is barred. The whole of the ritual was a shadowy and unsatisfying pantomime of the work that Jesus later was to do effectively and once for all.

One point seems clear. This chapter was not written by a man or for men who had turned in weariness and contempt from a disappointing experience of the sacrificial system. Neither writer nor readers seem to have had any firsthand acquaintance with Jewish sacrifices. If they had had any, surely the author would have written with more

regard for the realities of the case. His thought is not of the temple of his day, but of the ancient tabernacle. He does not stop to ask whether this tabernacle ever existed. Certainly in the form in which it is described by the priestly writers, it did not exist at the time and in the circumstances in which they place it. Even on the most literal reading of the story the tabernacle was not yet erected at the time the Sinai covenant was inaugurated.

The author speaks of the ark of the covenant ; but so far as we know, from the time of the Exile the ark had been only a memory. In other words, the institutions and the ritual to which this writer goes for his prophecy of the priestly work of Jesus, he knows not by experience but by Bible study. As the commentators have abundantly shown, he is not at all careful to confine himself to the Exodus account, but makes much use of traditional Rabbinic additions.

If the tabernacle as described in the priestly documents did not exist, did not at least exist as and when they described it as existing, are we to discard the whole story ? By no means. It is a priestly parable, indicative of the conditions under which we may draw near to God (ix. 9). But a parable is precisely what the writer "to the Hebrews" calls the tabernacle and its ritual. It might be too much to infer that he is as conscious as we are that the priestly accounts of the tabernacle are parable rather than history. It seems

safe at least to say that he was not interested in the question whether the priestly tabernacle of Exodus ever had an historical counterpart.

The realisation of the author's attitude to the Old Testament narrative sheds light on various questions raised by the passage. Modern sentiment has sometimes been offended by the prominence given to blood in certain sections of the New Testament. The original associations of the blood in connection with animal sacrifice do seem to the modern mind revolting ; but it is easy to exaggerate greatly the extent to which these associations are retained in New Testament references to the death of Jesus. The Leviticus text read : "The life of all flesh is its blood," and perhaps we do not seriously distort the meaning of New Testament writers if we substitute "life" for "blood."

In this chapter (ix.) the author uses two illustrations, which he evidently means to be parallel. In one, the ceremonies at the inauguration of the first covenant, the shedding of blood is declared to be essential (ix. 22). In the other, the death of a man by which his will comes into force, the manner of his death is immaterial (ix. 16). It is noteworthy that in the Synoptic accounts of the crucifixion there is no reference to the shedding of the blood of Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, perhaps for theological reasons, the shedding of Jesus' blood is mentioned (xix. 34), with that restraint which

characterises the whole Gospel record in dealing with delicate subjects.

In his disregard for the whole system of "clean" and "unclean" foods and of lustrations for ceremonial defilement, the author has the explicit sanction of Jesus. In the case of ritual defilement contracted by contact with a dead body, he seems to allow some kind of reality to the defilement, and to acknowledge that the application of running water, with which had been mixed the ashes of a "red, unblemished, unyoked cow" that had been burned, had some kind of efficacy in removing this defilement, which after all was only skin-deep. Philo would not have acknowledged that the ceremony produced no spiritual effect, any more than a modern Hindu would grant that the defilement was only skin-deep. This author shows no interest in the question.

More curious still is the fact that, if one were to judge from this passage alone, one might suppose that it was his considered judgment that, under the Old Covenant, no Israelite ever had the consciousness of sin forgiven, or ever made approach to God except by the way of bloody sacrifice. Yet he presumably knew the beginning of Psalm xxxii.: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." He must have known the great prophetic passages which, whether condemning the sacrificial system or not, certainly repudiate exclusive reliance on it:—

Jehovah saith, "What care I
For your multiplied sacrifice?
I am sick of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed beasts.
Blood of bullocks, of lambs, or of goats,
Is no pleasure to me" (Isa. i. 11).[1]

In the next chapter (x. 5–7) he himself quotes one of these passages (Ps. xl. 6–8); and among the heroes of faith in chapter xi. whose approach to God, however imperfect, is nevertheless real, in only one case could it be suggested from the record that that approach was mediated by sacrifice.

From the author's point of view there is no real inconsistency. The tabernacle and its ritual are, just as he calls them, a "parable" which he has found in his sacred book, a parable told by the Holy Spirit as later parables were told by Jesus. We must not press the details of this parable, any more than the details of the Gospel parables. Even in dealing with the point on which he insists so strongly, that God's covenant like a human will does not become effective till a death takes place, there is no attempt to find the rationale of this. Nor does he discuss the question it raises, whether this view of the only valid approach to God is not reverting to the belief in human sacrifice, which had been transcended in the story of the interrupted offering of Isaac. We must not forget however, that we have already had a suggestive discussion

[1] *Isaiah in Modern Speech*, by J. E. McFadyen.

of the meaning of Jesus' sufferings and death in chapters ii. and iv.

In using the language of the ancient ritual the author lifts us up to the sphere of the unseen things that abide. The old ceremonies dealt with ritual "cleanness" and "uncleanness"; Jesus dealt with moral and spiritual purity and defilement. The old ritual gave a physical sanctity; Jesus gives us a clean conscience. The victims of the old sacrifices had to be physically perfect; Jesus was pure in heart. The unwilling, unconscious victims of the former ritual were offered by the priest: Jesus offered Himself. Under the old covenant one who had come in contact with a corpse was considered unfit to enter the tabernacle. In the new covenant our whole lives, except in so far as they are inspired by what Jesus has done for us, are lived in the realm of death, transient and meaningless when they are not positively vicious. The Christian life too is a worship, a religious service ("latreuein," ix. 14); but the God of our worship is no mysterious Something whose existence is half hinted at through a doorway once a year, but the God who watches over His people with sleepless vigilance, the "living God."

The most striking phrase of all occurs in ix. 14: "through eternal spirit." Why did the offering of Jesus effect what the offering of animals failed to effect? Because the high priest was Jesus; because the victim was Jesus, the spotless Son of

God ; because the sacrifice was Jesus, not His blood, but His life, Himself ; because the offering was not made to provide the worshippers with a superficial " holiness " that would give them a spurious standing with the " holy " God ; it was an offering of the Son by the Son, who was the radiance of the Father's glory and the very image of His being so that in all He did He represented the very thought of God.

The author here answers by anticipation a question that has perplexed the modern mind. How can religion, communion between the soul and its God, depend on an event in time, an event that happened in a small and, except for the history of religion, unimportant country nineteen hundred years ago? Can the spiritual depend on the temporal in this way? The question is more difficult for us than it was for the author of this epistle. He believed that the appearance and the death of Christ had taken place " at the end of the world " (ix. 26), and that the speedy dissolution of all things terrestrial and the return of Jesus Himself would show His death to all men as having the central significance it had for him. But the expected did not happen. The ages have rolled on ; we get farther and farther away from the historic Calvary ; and, outside of the Christian religion, the days of His flesh do not divide the history of mankind into two epochs as they do for the Christian.

The writer has given us in germ the only answer we can ever have, the only answer we need. What Jesus did, He did "through eternal spirit." The life of Christ and the death of Christ took place under conditions of time and space; but they take us into the eternal, unseen world where time and space are forgotten. The life of Jesus, and still more, His death, reveal to us the eternal thought of God towards man, and especially towards the sin that separates man from God. At all costs God will remove the barrier, even at the cost of sharing man's life and bearing the burden of his sin. The feeling, the thought, the purpose, that are eternally in the mind of God, Jesus carried out in the realm of the visible, once for all. "Let us draw near to God" is the text of this author's practical discourse, and "through eternal spirit" is the motto of his argument.

This writer, then, attempts to find no rationale of sacrifice, not even of the death of Christ. It would be absurd to say that he is not a thinker; but he is primarily a pastor and a religious teacher, full of concern for the spiritual condition of his pupils. Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, we get completely out of touch with the writer, unless we realise that he is not writing theology *in vacuo*, but is trying to interpret a memorable experience. He had felt that something stood between him and God and knew that that something was his own life. If we do not feel it, it

does not follow that we are nearer God than he was, or have more intimate communion with God than he had, and the men of his time who felt like him. It is as true to-day as then that "the pure in heart shall see God."

Then came those who had heard the Lord (ii. 3) with their story of the ministry of Jesus, and their assurance that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." We do not quite know how they conceived this; probably there was no one dominating conception. With those who were familiar with sacrificial systems, whether from experience or from literature, the imagery of that system might colour their thoughts of their new experience. As Deissmann has reminded us, Paul thought of it under various images. Now he was an accused person declared "not guilty"; again an enemy of God whom God had reconciled to Himself through Christ. At one time he was a debtor whose debt had been paid, at another a slave for whom the ransom price had been delivered. Under whatever figure the experience was represented, the experience itself was always the same; through the life, and especially through the death, of Jesus a crushing burden had been lifted, a new sense of freedom and self-mastery had been given, that made one feel a "new creature"; the veil that hindered free intercourse with God had been torn aside; one could without let or hindrance draw near to God; and all this,

explain it as one will, had been effected through Jesus.

Were they mistaken? Perhaps for no previous generation is it so difficult as for our own to view with an unprejudiced eye the data for answering that question. The influence of the personality, the teaching, the work of Jesus, has so penetrated the thought of mankind, not only of the Christian Church but of the whole civilised world, that we cannot now, by any effort of imagination, picture what the world would be had Jesus never lived. We know in a measure, though we very imperfectly realise, what Jesus has meant to the life of which we form a part. But it is hardly an exaggeration to say that to-day Jesus is at once the conscience and the inspiration of mankind; of the Orient hardly less than of the nations we call Christian. The new life that pulses through India, China and Japan, the awakening of Africa, the new hope and the new ambition that are re-creating countries, even continents, that but yesterday were sunk in intellectual and spiritual stagnation; all are directly the work of that same Jesus who lived and who gave His life "in the spirit of the eternal." Men in these countries might use, some of them in fact are using, dropping the metaphors, almost the same language of what they owe to Jesus as we find in the epistle "to the Hebrews."

Does the author put too great a stress on the death of Christ as opposed to His life? A recent

writer has told us that Paul's concentration of faith upon the crucifixion and resurrection is "an unfortunate element which has left a trail of morbid sentiment all through the centuries of Christianity." It is easy to make statements of this kind when for nineteen centuries the death and resurrection of Jesus have been regarded as the very kernel of the Gospel, when it is impossible for any human being to say what the history of our religion would have been had the emphasis been placed elsewhere.

Judging from our New Testament records it seems practically certain that, but for the belief that "Jesus died for our sins," our religion would have had no history at all. If ever we are tempted to think it a morbid impulse that led the Church to choose and to abide by the cross as the symbol of what it lives by and what it stands for, we can at least ask ourselves what would have happened if Jesus had chosen to live a few more years and to die a natural death. Would His influence have been greater, more inspiring, healthier, than it is to-day? Let those believe it who can. We cannot know all that was in His mind; but we know that when He saw that the leaders of His people were determined to bring Him to the cross, He chose to let them have their will. In making this choice He believed He was fulfilling the will of God. The history of Christendom from that day has justified His choice.

## CHAPTER XII

## A STEADY GRIP OF OUR CONFESSION
(x. 1–39)

The argument seems to be finished—for all practical purposes it is finished—but there are some scattered threads to be picked up, some points to be underscored. In the first place (x. 1) then, the author reiterates that the Law is only a shadow cast before by the glories of the future. Paul could never have called the Law a shadow. To him in his pre-Christian days, with its heart-searching, impossible demands on one's moral strength, it was a grim, a fatal reality. But to this author, if the Law was only a shadow, at least it *was* a shadow, forecasting, however dimly, a future revelation. The work done in our day on the history of religion helps us to enter into this point of view, especially when we remember that he is speaking, not of practices prevalent in his own time, but of a ritual ascribed to an age long gone by. The people who call for prophetic censure are not those who, in their search for the unknown God and for peace of conscience, devise means of approach to God that to a later age seem pathetically

ineffective. Rather it is those who cling to the beliefs and practices of the dim, twilight ages of the world when the light of God's truth is shining all around them.

Three verses (x. 5–7) of Psalm xl. (6–8) are treated in the author's characteristic way :—

> " Sacrifice of animals and fruits of the earth thou didst not desire ;
> But a body didst thou prepare for me.
> Holocausts and sin-offerings thou didst not ask.
> Then said I : Lo ! I come.
> In the roll of the book thy directions are written for me.
> To do thy will, my God, am I resolved."

Even here he clings to his thesis that animal sacrifice was ordained by God as a shadowy prophecy of the true sacrifice. In the first place, by what may have originally been a clerical error, the phrase occurs in the Greek though not in the Hebrew, " a body didst thou prepare for me." It is on this mistranslation, suggesting the incarnation as it does, that the author bases his use of the psalm. According to the original sense, the psalmist comes with a roll-book of the Law, probably " Deuteronomy," in his hand, and expresses his resolve to do God's will as it is written in the Law. This author drops the phrase " I am resolved " in the last line, puts the whole into the mouth of the Messiah, and thus finds the meaning that the Messiah comes to do God's will by offering His own body in sacrifice instead of animal sacrifice ;

which offering of Himself is represented as foretold in Scripture.

Some questions suggest themselves. Is it quite correct to say, as the author says here, that the constant repetition of animal sacrifices is a proof of their ineffectiveness (x. 2)? Would not the natural inference be that whatever efficacy they had availed only for the past, that each new day and hour brought its fresh burden of sin to be atoned for by new offerings? Even among Christians do not the purest have to wash the dust of life's highway from their feet?

Further, he expressly denies to the ritual any power of winning forgiveness of sins (x. 4). Once again we have to ask, quite apart from animal sacrifice, did the saints of the Old Covenant never know the experience of sin forgiven? To say nothing of the definite promises of such forgiveness in the law books, the author could hardly have forgotten Isaiah's

> "Come," saith Jehovah, "and now
> Let us reason together.
> Your sins, though like scarlet, may yet
> Become white as the snow.
> And though they be crimson-red,
> They may yet be as wool" (i. 18).[1]

It was at least true that the prevailing mood of the Old Testament was that of unsatisfied longing, of waiting for a fuller revelation of God and more

[1] *Isaiah in Modern Speech*, by J. E. McFadyen.

intimate fellowship with Him, that the Old Testament on the whole pointed forward. From the time of Jesus the Church no more speaks of the Coming One ; rather the only Coming One is Jesus Himself.

That the Christian has no artificial protection from sin this writer well knows. His reason for sending the epistle is just that he fears that his readers are drifting away, are in danger of committing the greatest sin of all, apostasy from the "living God." How then can he draw the absolute distinction he does between the permanent forgiveness won by the sacrifice of Jesus and the fleeting satisfaction that is the best the old ritual can attain ? He does not work out the answer to this question. He is quite clear that even Christian forgiveness, even the Christian's access to God, can be forfeited ; we have to "cling" to our confession. But if we do cling to it, then the sins we commit are such as the son commits when he is safe in his father's home, not like the daily challenge of the rebel's life he lived in the far country.

All through we have to remember that the author is describing Christianity not as a life but as a worship, that the terms he uses are therefore ritual rather than moral. The question the epistle seeks to answer is : "How can man get access to God ?" The author is as convinced as Paul, though he puts the point differently, that the answer is : Not through anything in man's

character, not through any human achievement, but only through something done on our behalf once for all by Jesus.

Thus he represents the Messiah as saying, in the psalm: "Behold, I come to do thy will" (x. 9). On his exegesis this means that the Messiah, rejecting animal sacrifice, offers His own body (again we note there is no emphasis on the blood). "It is in this will," he adds, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all, that we are sanctified" (x. 10); and by "sanctified" he does not mean "made perfect in character"; rather he means, "made ritually holy" so to speak, made fit to enter the presence of God. Because Jesus, who shared our blood and flesh (ii. 13, 14), fulfilled the will of God by living and by dying as God would have Him, He has raised the whole human race to a new level of possibility, removed an ancient disability, and given access to God to all who will follow Him as Captain of their salvation.

x. 19–25

The teacher has finished his argument; the preacher resumes his sermon. In Isaiah's prophecy of the Joy of the Redeemed he sang:—

> "And there a pure highway shall rise,
> To be called 'The Holy Way,'
> The unclean shall not pass over it,
> Fools shall not wander therein" (xxxv. 8).[1]

[1] *Isaiah in Modern Speech*, by J. E. McFadyen.

In the fourth Gospel Jesus says, "I am the Way." Jesus, says this writer, has opened up to us the Way into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God Himself. It is not an old road modernised with new ritual or up-to-date theology; it is a new way, a living way, for it is made with the life-blood of Jesus Himself; so that the course of time, the progress of thought, the wider knowledge of other ways, can never lessen its sole power to carry us to God. As in one solemn moment each year the high priest parted the curtain that hid the Most Holy Place, so Jesus by His "flesh," by His life and death, has parted for us the curtain of the eternal. "With a loud cry Jesus breathed His last; and the veil of the Temple parted in two from top to bottom" (Mark xv. 38). Jesus has not only made the way; He Himself has entered in, the great High Priest over God's house.

There is no constraint; God will not compel us to come in as the host in the parable compelled the homeless wanderers to come to his feast. But does not the whole picture conjured up impel us to follow where Jesus leads? This writer is no sentimentalist; he makes very sparing use of the language of the emotions, far less than Paul does. Part of the power of the Synoptic Gospels is just that their writers had the literary art to let the story speak for itself. They repeat the sayings and recount the incidents, with never an exclamation, hardly a comment. Made great by the story

they have to tell, they simply present Jesus who has meant so much to them, and leave Him to make His own impression on their readers. The writer "to the Hebrews" goes into no rhapsodies over the love, call it rather the heroic, self-forgetting comradeship, that sent Jesus on the way of blood, to open for us the door that hid God; but his reticence does not conceal from us how profoundly he was moved.

"We have courage" (one of the author's favourite words) "then to enter in. Let us draw near" (a technical term of worship), "forgetting the hindrances that have hitherto barred our access to God, clean alike in conscience and body through the new standing before God that our Captain has won for us" (x. 19–22). (It is possible that in "our body washed with clean water" there is a reference to baptism; but, as "the sprinkling of the heart" is certainly metaphorical, the other phrase may be also.)

"We have all repeated the confession of the Christian hope. Let us keep a grip of that confession. We put our trust in God; God is worthy of our trust. God has promised; He will keep His promises" (x. 23). Here then is the "gracious circle." We trust in the finished work of Jesus, because God is what He is; our confidence in God comes from this, that in the offering of Jesus we believe we are looking into the very inmost thought of God towards us.

In this passage the noble eloquence of the writer takes one of its loftiest flights ; yet here as much as anywhere his thought has to be interpreted before it makes its full impression on us. We think of our separation from God under moral and spiritual categories ; he thinks of it under ritual categories. It needs an effort of imagination to realise that it is the same experience he is interpreting. The following, for example, taken from a lecture by Dr. Sidney Cave, reads almost like a translation of the thesis of this epistle for the benefit of modern Indian readers.

" Converts from caste Hinduism feel the appeal of Christ's words, they gain from Him something of His confidence in God's love, and because of this they know themselves to be liberated from the bondage of the karmic order, that they may be no longer cogs in a great machine, but the children of a heavenly Father who is active in their lives, and to whose mercy and faithfulness they can gladly leave the final issue of their own and others' lives." [1] He thinks of Jesus as having, in His capacity as a member of the human race, dealt on behalf of mankind with death and sin, and so having started man on a new and final chapter of potential achievement ; but the modern writer is interpreting the same experience as the ancient.

That the author has no mechanical view of permanent " purification " will presently appear

[1] " Rebirth or Immortality," in *Expositor*, February 1924, p. 119.

when he utters his solemn warning against men who give up the Christian Faith. Even in this sentence it is not the priest who speaks but the prophet. "As we think of this revelation of the love of God and of Jesus, let us take thought for each other, trying to stir up a *paroxysm* of loving, kindly deeds" (x. 24). (We think of a very different kind of paroxysm (the same word, Acts xv. 39) that once sprang up between Paul and Barnabas.) "Do not desert your Christian meeting, as some are in the habit of doing. Rather exhort each other, and all the more as you see God's great day approaching" (x. 25).

"The meetings" were presumably stated meetings for worship. One suggestion is that these dissidents were leaving "their own congregation" to attend another in the same city; another is that some, in fancied superiority to the weak brothers who were causing the author so much anxiety, were withdrawing from fellowship with them. Judging from the context, especially from the following section, the most likely supposition is that some members of the community, who at one time had had an enthusiastic Christian faith and still had some kind of attachment to the fellowship, had grown cold; under the influence of persecution, long-continued waiting for the return of Jesus that never came, imperfect understanding of the centrality of Jesus, and the attraction of other faiths.

The waning of their enthusiasm showed itself in indifference to their fellow-Christians, and in failure to attend the Christian meetings ; while apparently, without realising the disloyalty involved, they began occasionally to join in the devotions of representatives of other faiths. This writer, like other New Testament writers, thinks of Christians as members of a fellowship ; the individual who leaves the fellowship can no more retain the fervour of his faith and hope and love apart from the central fire of the common life than the coal can keep its heat when ejected from the furnace. They were of those who say they get nothing out of the Church and forget that the real question is, " What can we put into the Church ? " A little kindly thought for the needs and difficulties of their fellow-Christians would have been the best of all tonics for their drooping faith. Instead of that, they had been guilty of the greatest heresy of all, the sin of discouraging the people.

x. 26–31

This leads to the third of the three passages on the " unpardonable sin " (cf. ii. 1–4 ; vi. 3–8). It is as uncompromising as the others, but makes it even clearer what kind of " sin " he has in mind. The first word in the paragraph is " deliberately," its position giving it unusual emphasis. He is thinking of no " slip," but of a course of conduct entered on with one's eyes open. The person he

despairs of has "trampled on God's Son, treated the covenant blood which gave Him his standing with God as if it were like any other blood, and insulted the gracious Spirit which prompted the work of redeeming love" (x. 29). His sin is that of the man who once followed with Jesus but now is with those who shout "Crucify Him!"

All through the epistle the author has been heaping up comparatives to show the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old. But the measure by which the covenant inaugurated by Jesus towers above the Sinai covenant is also the measure of the added responsibility of those who have heard the Gospel. Under the old covenant, the criminal died "on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (x. 28). Why does he recall this detail? Not only to remind us that even the old law had strict regard for justice. Was he not thinking also of the little company of two or three that met together in Jesus' name, a tiny band all but swallowed up in the throngs of "unbelievers" all round them; of the disheartening discovery that one "brother" after another was forsaking their little "gathering"; of the sense of outrage when each new Judas was found to have gone over to the enemy, even though, like those who crucified Jesus, he did not fully realise what he was doing?

Something more terrible than the death of the body will be the fate of those who have once felt the spell of Jesus and then have joined His enemies.

The author draws a very human picture of God, like any earthly tyrant, exacting a terrible vengeance from apostates (x. 30), a picture which falls below the level of the New Testament conception of God, and one for which the materials are two misquotations from "Deuteronomy" (xxxii. 35f.). When David got his choice he said: "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, . . . let me not fall into the hand of man" (2 Sam. xxiv. 14), as Sir Richard Grenville in a later day would have chosen to fall into the hands of God, not into the hands of Spain. "It is terrible," says this writer, "to fall into the hands of the living God." We do not speak like that nowadays; yet Jesus and Paul are with the author of "To the Hebrews" in the solemnity with which he speaks of the fate of those who, knowing the better, choose the worse.

x. 32–34

As in chapter vi. the author turns away from the gloomy picture he has conjured up and insists that "some better thing" is in store for his friends. He has one last appeal to make. Blessed is the man who is not afraid to recall his past; and the record of these men is such that their pastor can tell them to "remember," remember a time when they were nearer God than they are now, when their Christian faith and love had all the glad enthusiasm of morning, when in their new-found Christian joy their hearts were swelling with

gratitude to God, and nothing they were called on to do or suffer could even begin to pay the debt they owed.

They had been subjected to public insult and wrong. When they themselves escaped this fate, of their own accord they took their places beside their friends who were being so treated. When their Christian comrades were cast into prison, in spirit they shared their lot, and, as Jesus had directed them, they openly helped the prisoners. Robbed of their own goods, perhaps in consequence of this public display of sympathy for "criminals," they had remembered how the Master had said: "Rejoice and exult when men insult you and persecute you." They knew they had a better possession that no man could take from them.

x. 35f.

Was it all to go for nothing, all the joy and spiritual triumph of those glad days? Their pastor cannot think it. They are not going to lose their "bold spirit" now. God does not forget. (The word he uses to indicate that God "pays back" kindnesses (x. 35) is the same word as he used in ii. 2 to indicate that under the Old Covenant every transgression received its just requital.) They are on the "last lap"; but it is the last lap, even the last few yards, that test the runner. What they need is to "hold out" (one of his favourite words).

## A Steady Grip of Our Confession

x. 37f.

A quotation from Habakkuk, which combines the usual appositeness of his quotations with the usual daring disregard of the original meaning of the words, serves the double purpose of a final warning and an introduction to the classic chapter on faith. In face of some great heathen power that had terrorised not Israel only but the world, Habakkuk had received from God the message that God will send a vision, will so reveal Himself in the future historical development of the people that His honour and His truth will be vindicated. Until that vindication comes, the pious man must keep his trust in God ; " His steadfastness will be his life."

As transformed by this author the prophecy means : " The Coming One (Messiah) shall come immediately, and (my) just man shall find life through his faith ; and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him " (x. 39). We, he concludes, with that boldness which, in dealing with the timid, so often achieves its purpose, are not the men to be guilty of that shrinking which means spiritual death ; ours is the *faith* that makes men masters of their souls.

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE CLOUD OF WITNESS-BEARERS
(xi. 1–40)

With this reference to faith the author reaches a section of his epistle which, as a specimen of sustained Christian eloquence, stands out even from the New Testament literature. As with all true eloquence, the language soars because the thoughts have wings. The English reader is fortunate in that the King James version has given us a rendering that has lost little of the spirit of the original. Once more we are reminded that, while the author's argument revolves round the high-priesthood of Jesus, his theme is, as he says it is, "the world to come" (ii. 5). At the end of the epistle he tells his readers that he has written "a word of exhortation" (xiii. 22). These two phrases exactly describe his subject and his object. He is trying to rouse to greater earnestness a company of people who lie very near his heart, to lift them to a higher spiritual plane, in which they will see more truly the issues of life. This he does by speaking of "the world to come," the world of unseen realities. Through the priestly self-offering of Jesus this

world is no longer hidden from us. "Let us draw near to God."

Pushed to a logical extreme, the argument on the "offering" of Jesus would mean that all the "fathers" lived lives of conscious failure and acknowledged exclusion from the presence of God; that however diligently they sought God, they never in any real sense found Him. Some meaning like that could be read into the saying of Jesus that the Baptist, who was the flower of the human race before the coming of the Kingdom, would take a very humble place in the Kingdom itself (Matt. xi. 11).

This eleventh chapter does not on the whole contradict that impression. The coming of Jesus, and especially His death, was the event towards which the whole previous history of God's dealings with His people had been leading up. Until Jesus parted the veil, no one could effectively say, "Let us draw near to God." Yet the author is evidently conscious that the picture he has drawn of the religious failure of the Old Covenant is misleading. To say that until Christ came there was no real sense of sin forgiven or fellowship with God was not the whole truth. On the contrary, there were splendid pages of Old Testament history that told of temptations resisted, of trust triumphing over fear and loss, over pain and death, because there were men and women even then who knew God and walked with God.

Not only so ; there were heroes and heroines of faith in the long ages before Jesus whom men and women in the more favoured days of the new revelation might well take as models. Indeed we largely miss the point of the whole chapter if we do not realise the part it plays in the author's appeal to his readers. It is not just a "tale of golden deeds." It is an historical recital meant to revive drooping hope and courage, to put iron into the blood of those whose moral stamina was weakening. Here, the writer seems to say, were men and women in days gone by who faced the same difficulties and temptations, the same cruel persecutions you have to face ; who never "shrank" but marched breast-forward, never doubted God's existence or God's goodness, or dreamt for a moment that ultimately the oppressor would triumph. Epoch-making as the coming of Jesus was, yet Moses and Jesus, the faithful of old time and the faithful of to-day, belong to the one household of faith (iii. 5, 6).

He has shown us the Old Covenant at its worst. Here, he seems to say, is the Old Covenant at its best. From the days of Moses, from long before the days of Moses, there were pious souls who lived "in the spirit of the eternal." He speaks of "the world to come" ; but in a very real sense the world to come had been present from the beginning for those who had the eyes to see it. He invites his readers to ascend with him this Old

Testament Mount of Transfiguration, and hold converse for a time with the saints of the past, who had triumphed over the limitations of time and sense and dwelt with God in the world of unseen realities.

These men and women saw the vision "from afar" (xi. 13), as Christian and Hopeful on the Delectable Mountains saw the gates of the Celestial City from afar; but they saw it. They held out, not as if they saw, but actually seeing Him who is hidden from all human eyes (xi. 27). The epistle provides one answer for those who still ask about the place of the Old Testament in the sacred literature of the Church. There are things in the Old Testament that have had their day; there is teaching that gives imperfect or even distorted views of God; there are ritual regulations that are for us but parables, some of them not very helpful even as parables. Yet to drop the Old Testament from our canon would be to deprive the Church of a rich heritage, of a literature that breathes the very presence of God, of the records of the only men and women in the days before Christ to whose story we turn primarily because it leads us to God.

These historical retrospects are a familiar form of Hebrew literature. We find them for example in the farewell address of Joshua, in various psalms, in the message of the dying Mattathias to his sons, and in the defence of Stephen. In this chapter it is a poet who speaks; and he claims at times the

same freedom in the treatment of Old Testament history as he uses in his exegesis of Old Testament texts.

In some cases the record had already been transfigured before it reached the sacred page. To the people of the time who knew anything of it, perhaps in a measure even to Abraham himself, his migration doubtless seemed, like any other migration, dictated largely by economic considerations. Later, men saw in it a divine "call," a purpose of God not only for Abraham and his descendants but for the human race. The nomad life was the very symbol of the transient, with its eternal pitching and striking of tents, here to-day, gone to-morrow. The writer "To the Hebrews" represents Abraham as consciously seeking a city; but it was no earthly city that Abraham looked for; it was a city in which the weary wanderer might find the Rest of God; one whose buildings were on solid foundation, as for men who had chosen an abiding place, a city planned and built by God.

On the whole the sights and sounds that greet us in the Gospel story are those of the country; Jesus was a Man of the open air, of the village and the country town, one who loved to be on the road, among farms and vineyards, by the lakeside or on the hill. Yet it was not strange that the imagination of the early Christians should inherit the Jewish fancy that the ideal home of God's

people was a city. A city represents strength, and knowledge, and culture. More than that : the Christian Church was the " fellowship," and the city presented at least the possibility of a mighty fellowship such as the desert and the village could never give. Moreover to men of a missionary faith, a great metropolis that like a magnet drew to itself people of all classes and races and creeds seemed like a parable of the Church.

The work of the apostle Paul had centred largely in the great cities : in Ephesus and Philippi, Corinth and Athens. " Rome for Christ " represented the summit of his Christian ambition. To the early Christian imagination there were two cities that could appeal beyond all others. Of these Jerusalem had already crucified the Christ, perhaps had already fallen by the time this letter was written. Rome had already entered on that bloody persecution of the Church that gave us the book of Revelation. Can we wonder that the hopes of the Christians took the shape of a new Jerusalem ?

Sometimes the author idealises the narrative without direct authority from the Bible record. Thus in speaking of the birth of Isaac he ignores the incredulity of both Abraham and Sarah. He ascribes Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac to his confidence that God could raise his son from the dead. He tells us that Moses left Egypt (and went to Midian) " with no fear of the king's

anger," which is hardly the impression we get from the second chapter of "Exodus." For such poetic liberties we may blame him if we have never been guilty of straining a Biblical text in order to make a homiletic point.

In its familiarity with the unseen this chapter makes something of the same impression on us as is made by a study of the records of Jesus. Reading the Gospels, we feel that we are in the presence of One who lived always in the presence of God; one to whom God was not an inference or a presupposition, not a convention or an item in a creed, but "Father." To Him the unseen was as real as the seen. Yet there is this difference. In the Synoptics at least, Jesus was always at home in His Father's world. To this writer the patriarchs were pilgrims and strangers, sojourning for a time in an alien land till they could reach the eternal city that God had prepared for them. In the infancy of the Church, and in a time of persecution such as faced the writer and readers of this epistle, it was natural to think of Christians too as men whose only citizenship was in heaven. The civil power of Rome had begun to throw its weight against them as the religious authorities in Jerusalem did at the beginning. It was hardly an exaggeration to say that "the world" was against them, and it was natural, therefore, to think that they were not of "the world."

For that sense of the unseen which is the theme

of this chapter the author uses the word "faith." It was not quite what Jesus had meant by "faith." Jesus had thought rather of the healing power of God as flowing all around us. To throw down the barriers that human nature erects against Divine influence, to open the sluice-gates and let the life-giving streams flow in, that is the work of faith. Still less has the author in mind that mystic union with Christ which Paul calls faith. For this writer "faith" is the faculty that enables us to transcend sense and apprehend the eternal verities. "It is through faith that we know our hopes will come true, that we realise the unseen" (xi. 1). It is only by an act of faith that we recognise that the very stage on which the whole drama has been enacted was made and ordered by "the word of God," that this visible world is the embodiment of ideas that exist, invisible to us, in the mind of God (xi. 3). If we would really approach God we must have faith that God exists, that they who seek Him shall find that God controls the moral order (xi. 6).

To the author, one of the lessons of the story is that again and again God had intervened to save His people when it seemed as if all hope had gone; had saved them while men simply stood and saw the salvation of God, or had used the humblest instruments. Had Abraham slain Isaac, the drama would have been played out almost ere it had begun. If the parents of Moses had not

been people of unusual penetration and courage, pre-Christian Israel would have lost its central figure. It is not easy to realise how the claims of prudence, gratitude and lifelong friendships, of culture and natural ambition, must have appealed with almost irresistible force to Moses, to cast in his lot with the Egyptians rather than with the downtrodden serfs that he called his people. Had he done so, so far as we can see, no one could have taken his place. Had the Red Sea not done just what it did when it did, and surely the " chances " were all against it, the story would all have had to be written differently. These " ifs " exist for us, but not for God. He sees the end from the beginning. The purposes of God that this writer calls the " promises " may have a long, and to human eyes, a dubious history ; but in the long-run history vindicates the man of " faith " to whom the future is as certain as the present and the unseen as real as the seen.

The chapter tells of faith shown in the morning of life, at its midday and its evening, faith of men and women, of Jew and Gentile, of saint and harlot. It was at Moses' birth that the splendid courage of his parents in following their God-given instinct saved him, and, saving him, made possible the salvation of his people. It was when Moses " grew up " that, with full realisation of all that the choice meant, he cast in his lot with the slaves, whom only God-given wisdom could recog-

nise as the bearers of the torch. Even on their deathbeds Isaac, Jacob and Joseph were as certain that God was guiding as they had been in the confidence of physical and intellectual maturity.

All through the chapter the preacher speaks with his eye on the situation of his readers, but he tactfully leaves them to make the application for themselves. Did they sometimes feel that Christians were in a hopeless minority against all that counted in the world of politics, of letters, of religion? Noah had stood alone against a scoffing world. Did they sometimes feel inclined to give up the Christian faith as a piece of idealism that had no place in a practical world, and to cast in their lot with some of the popular world faiths? If the patriarchs had wanted to return to the heathen land from which they had come out, they could have done so. They held on because they knew that the land of their adoption, homeless wanderers though they were in it, was the true pathway to their abiding spiritual home. Did they feel the disillusionment that comes to men on fire with a selfless enthusiasm when they find how unresponsive the world is? That was what Moses felt when he had made his great renunciation for the sake of his people and then learnt that his people would have none of him. He fled to Midian, in no selfish and cynical abandonment of his life's work, but persevering in it "as seeing Him who is invisible."

From the very beginning of history those who lived in the spirit of the eternal had been hated and persecuted by others whose vision was limited by the seen things that pass. From the beginning it was the men of the earth-vision that seemed to triumph, but only in the myopic view of those like-minded with themselves. Cain thought he had brought Abel's life to an end ; on the contrary, from the sacred page the voice of Abel speaks to us to this day.

The men to whom this letter was sent were bearing " the reproach of Christ " ; some of them were finding it too hard to bear. The author reminds them that " the reproach of Christ " was no new form of suffering ; the bearing of it manfully was no new form of heroism. The world was made through Christ ; the spirit of Christ had not then first entered the world when Jesus was born ; nor did the spirit of the persecutors of the Christ first come to life in the men who hounded Jesus to death. The psalmist did not know all that he meant when he said : " Remember, Lord, the reproach of Thy servants . . . wherewith Thine enemies . . . have reproached the footsteps of Thine anointed " (Psalm lxxxix. 50f.). Moses in his day bore the reproach of Christ ; he was only one, though the chief one, in the long line of those who had chosen the path of suffering and found it also the path of wisdom ; for that God rewards is one of the writer's most certain and unashamed convictions (xi. 26).

Did the readers of the epistle think their teacher a too stern moralist, who saw approaching tragedy where there was none? It had been so in the days of Noah, yet Noah was vindicated; the only people who were "saved" were the handful who took God's warning seriously and accepted God's proffered means of salvation. Even so it was in the days of the Exodus; there was tragedy afoot, but there was escape for those who would have it on God's terms. Doubtless there were some among the readers, as there are many on the mission-fields to-day, who resented the family separations involved in following Jesus, who refused to believe it was God's will that men should pluck out eyes and cut off hands "for the sake of the Gospel." Abraham had stood the test when the issues at stake were far bigger than family affection; when it seemed as if the very continuance of God's purpose in the world depended on the life of Isaac.

Sometimes, as at Jericho, God wrought His wonders for His people without human aid. Sometimes, as at the Red Sea, He turned aside the threatened danger; or again, if it must come, He gave His people courage to endure, as in the horrible tortures that the Maccabees and others suffered so unflinchingly (xi. 35ff.). The readers were tempted to secure their redemption from death at the price of their souls; men of faith, in the days before Christ, when offered their lives on condition of

abjuring their faith, had chosen to die (xi. 35. See the stories of the Maccabees).

As was natural in the circumstances, the triumph of faith over fear, and especially over the fear of death, was prominent in the author's mind, as he wished it to be in the minds of his readers. They feared the wrath of the emperor ; neither Moses nor the parents of Moses feared the wrath, surely no less terrible, of the emperor of their day (xi. 23, 27). God has so many ways of delivering from the fear of death those who put their trust in Him. He can snatch from the jaws of death, as He snatched Isaac, when the knife was in his father's hand. As in the case of Enoch, we may live so near God that death is no death, but only a transition to a fuller fellowship. The faithful dead, like Abel, live on in this sense, that their faith inspires us to a like faith with theirs ; for it is of no cry for vengeance the author is thinking when he tells us that through faith Abel, though dead, is still speaking. The absence of anger at or desire for vengeance on persecutors is one of the characteristics of the book. The living spirit can triumph over the dying body, when the man of faith at the end of his life looks out into the future with courage and confidence, and sees God's purpose working itself out with righteousness and love, as the dying Joseph gave instructions "about his bones." As the gladiators in the arena ere they began to fight greeted the emperor with "We

dying men salute thee," so Abraham and the patriarchs saw from afar the fulfilment of God's promises, and saluted them as they died (xi. 13).

It has already been noted that this writer mentions the resurrection of Jesus only in his closing benediction (xiii. 20). One reason is just that to him the unseen world was so real; he did not think of the resurrection of Jesus as an event. To him the death of Jesus was only the parting of the veil, which in His case had hardly hidden the world of eternal realities. For this writer the resurrection of men of faith is only the falling of scales from their eyes. The Maccabees knew that, and had no fear of death, not even of death in its most excruciating forms; because the life that lay beyond it was better than the short protraction of an earthly career to be bought by the surrender of truth and honour. There is the same interpretation as Jesus gives of "I am . . . the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. iii. 6; Mark xii. 27; Heb. xi. 16). Here as elsewhere the author reads back the ideas of a later time into the story; but is not the faith of which it tells us all the greater just because they had not then the fuller light of later days? Abraham going forth, "not knowing whither he went," is the father of the faithful of all ages. He went into the unknown, yet to him it was not unknown, for he knew that God was there.

For sheer spiritual power these glowing verses

are among the most treasured possessions of the Church. The chapter records a glorious apostolical succession of men and women, who in many cases held no office, and enjoyed no title but the title of their own faith. Great as they were, they can do nothing for us but leave us their shining example. The writer tacitly rejects any idea that these can "intercede" for us. All through the chapter too we can read between the lines the author's fixed conviction of the divine purpose that runs through the ages—the "promise" as he calls it—a purpose that needs its human instruments, and which no "accident," no "catastrophe," and no human will can thwart. The spiritual value of this chapter is independent of the results of critical investigation of the narratives. The question is not whether the incidents happened as the Old Testament writers said they happened, but whether their interpretation of life is a correct interpretation. It will always be that some worship while others doubt; the narratives have to be read in the light of the same faith in which they were written; here, as always, the pure in heart shall see God.

The faith of the Old Testament saints was, in one aspect of it, a vivid realisation of the unseen; in another, and not less important, aspect it was a confident hope in the future. That hope continued throughout the centuries to inspire the men of faith; but age after age its realisation was

postponed. Some great historical vindication of the hope was needed. Until Christ came it was always open to men of the world to say that the patriarchs should have gone home again ; that Moses should have stayed in the Egyptian Court ; that the Maccabees should have submitted and died in their beds. This writer, though he does not expatiate on it, shares to the full the New Testament conviction that Jesus Christ, God's full and final revelation to men, and especially His triumph over death, is the answer to all our spiritual problems.

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE BIRTHRIGHT OF SUFFERING
(xii. 1–29)

In this writer's finest flights of poetry or eloquence he is never just a poet or an orator, as in his speculations he is never just a philosopher. We sometimes speak of the "practical interludes" in this epistle; it might be nearer the truth to speak of the "theoretical interludes," though neither expression would be quite correct. Whatever literary method the author is adopting at any moment, his aim is always the same: to give his readers a firmer grasp of the unseen realities, to warn them of the danger in which they stand, to remind them of the worth of the prize that is all but slipping from their grasp.

### xii. 1–4

In the next section, while he follows out no one metaphor consistently, he is thinking generally of athletic contests. We get glimpses of the stadium, with its thronging spectators, the competitors stripping for the race, the course stretching far in front of them, the prize that awaits the victor.

We can see them running, every nerve at the strain, every eye on the goal ; and then, as the pace begins to tell and only those in perfect training can hold out, one after another fainting with exhaustion and dropping out of the race. Another time his thoughts are rather with the bloody contests of the gladiators, while again his words suggest a race such as that of our " harriers," with the pacemaker in front and the " whipper-in " to see that no one lags behind, only in this friendly race all are to be whippers-in. There is the long march too, or the cross-country run, when some go lame if the roads are rough, and with sheer weariness the dispirited runner crumples up.

The race-course and the gladiatorial show, with their strenuous preparation, their straining of muscle and nerve and heart, their forgetfulness of all but the prize, their fierce struggles that test courage and grit almost more than physical condition, are just about the last spheres of life to which one would go to illustrate our modern conception of Christianity, which has succeeded so well in adjusting itself to its environment that there is hardly ever a conscious jar. Is it only in " times of transition," as we are fond of calling them, that the forces of faith and unfaith are locked like this in deadly embrace ? Has the world of business, politics, social life and domestic life really been so far Christianised that these costly choices are no longer called for ? Or is it just that on the modern

organisation of society we are all so bound up with each other in nearly all the relations of life that what is everybody's sin is nobody's sin, and compromise at every point becomes part of the recognised ethic? At least this writer makes of life no sterner a business than Jesus makes of it.

More than once in the previous chapter he has spoken of the heroes of faith as having "witness" borne to them (xi. 2, 4, 5, 39). He now (xii. 1) thinks of them rather as witness-bearers (the Greek word he uses is the equivalent of our "martyr," and is apparently beginning to have something of its later sense). They bear witness to the reality and the worth of the spiritual world. As the author and his friends run their race, he thinks of all those victors of the past ringing them round, not so much as spectators, rather as those who have "quitted" themselves like men in the similar struggles of their own day, and by their very presence, by the memories their great names invoke, give new heart to those of a later generation. As the schoolboy on "sports" day spends his last ounce of strength for the honour of the school, all the more if there are veterans looking on, so this writer bids his readers run tirelessly in the presence of the champions of other days for the honour of the household of faith. Each generation that has passed since then, adding its honoured names to the glorious army of the men of faith, has given new strength to the appeal.

"Let us strip," he says to them. "Let us fling off our pride, fear, doubts. Sin, everything that separates us from God, would only impede our progress as a flowing robe would hinder the runner. The course is in front of us ; let us run with grit. Jesus our Captain is going on before ; let us keep our eyes fastened on Him, looking neither to right nor left (xii. 2). He held out on His course, a course that ended on the cross. What troubles you is that Christians are a despised race." (To say nothing of the agony of the cross, it was the most shameful death the Romans could inflict. As Cicero said, the very name of cross was unfit for the thoughts, the eyes, the ears of Roman citizens.) "But Jesus thought nothing of the disgrace, and now He has taken His seat at the right hand of God's throne, so that the limitless resources of God's grace and God's power are available for those who are His."

(The author speaks of the cloud of witnesses "set around us," "the course set in front of us," "the joy set in front of Jesus." It is very tempting to think that he means, "seeing a path of joy stretching in front of Him, a path He might have trodden, Jesus deliberately turned aside from it and chose the way of the Cross." This "course," too, had its spectators, not applauding, but deriding. The Greek could bear this construction : xii. 2, 3.)

Seeing his pupils dismayed and puzzled by their sufferings, their teacher has three things to say to

them. In the first place they were only sharing their Master's lot (xii. 3). Almost from the beginning of His ministry, His claims, His work of healing, His message of the kingdom, had been met by cruel criticism, by sneers, by plots against His life, and finally by the cross. Further, they are not pulling their full strength ; they have not yet put their whole heart into the struggle with the enemy within them (xii. 4). (Or, if "blood" is to be taken literally, "*you* have not yet had to shed any blood in your struggle against the sin in the world, as Jesus and your predecessors had to do.")

xii. 5–13

Finally, they have misconceived the whole situation. That suffering is a sign of God's indifference or hostility is a heathen view (it underlies, for example, the Hindu doctrines of "karma" and transmigration). As usual he turns, not to any saying of Jesus, but to an Old Testament passage, in this case to words evidently written at a time when the same problem faced Jewish thinkers (Prov. iii. 11, 12). "God's discipline," says Wisdom, or a sage representing Wisdom, "affects different people differently. Some men meet it with indifference or contempt ; they call their sorrows 'troubles' and regard them as nuisances to be evaded or endured with a minimum of discomfort. Others collapse under them. With no philosophy to give them courage, and no religion to let them

see God's hand in their trials, they regard themselves as helpless victims of life. What we call our troubles are God's fatherly discipline, a sign not that God has forgotten, but that God is remembering us." Therefore let them brace up their courage and go on with the race. If they walk in crooked ways of doubt and despondency their weaker brother may come to grief altogether. Let them set a straightforward example of courage and endurance (xii. 12f.).

xii. 14–17

The next section suggests that, as so often happens, spiritual sluggishness was accompanied, partly as cause, partly as effect, by a low moral tone. "Let every man of you be as a 'bishop,' whose care it is to see," in the words in which Moses warned his people against idolatry, "that there be no fellow-member whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God." It is not only sexual vice he has in mind, though he includes that; he is thinking rather of the spirit of Esau, who, with all his virtues, became the very type of the man brought up in pious surroundings who is essentially irreligious. Esau not only showed a childish lack of self-restraint, but by his choice became the Captain of Non-Faith, the leader of the spiritually blind.

Far from having a confident vision of the distant future, Esau cannot even look forward an hour or

two. The man of faith dwells in the unseen world. Esau virtually denied the existence of a spiritual world ; for, as seen at least by later ages, the " birthright " he sold so cheaply included the privilege that God's purpose of grace for mankind should run through his line. This Stoic Puritan will not waste a word of sympathy on Esau, whose story is surely one of the most moving in literature. Esau's decision, says the author, was final ; not all his tears of remorse could wash out a line of what he had written. Thus does he reiterate the conviction already twice expressed—a conviction which at least gives to life a seriousness and dignity it so often lacks—that however much we may hate and despise ourselves for the seed we have sown, yet the seed will bear its crop. Life does not treat us with the levity with which we so often treat life. Many, like Jonah, get a second chance ; but in life as we know it there are multitudes who have to abide by their decisions and make the best of them.

xii. 18–24

Is the second covenant then, like the first, a covenant of doom ? The author raises the question as he seems in fancy to hear his readers raising it. " On the contrary," he replies, " they have nothing in common but the penalty of rejection. All the accompaniments of the first covenant were such as to terrify and repel. Contrast all this

with the order that Jesus introduces. You have come not to Sinai, but to Zion ; to no spot on a map, but to the city which to find is to find God. It is the city which throughout the ages God has been preparing for men of faith, the heavenly Jerusalem which will fulfil the dreams that men dreamt of the holy city of the Jews ; the city not of the death-dealing God of the Old Covenant, but of the God who lives and imparts life.

" This time the ' drawing near ' is a reality ; there is no ' hands off ' sign over Zion. The congregation that you join is no crowd of fugitive, frightened, conscience-stricken slaves. At the giving of the old Law there were myriads of angels present " (at least the writer seems to have had this statement in his version of Deut. xxxiii. 2, though the passage does not quite mean this, even in the Greek). " At Mount Zion you will meet myriads of angels in festal array, as Jesus Himself once pictured them (Luke xv. 10). There too you will meet the congregation of those who follow Jesus like yourselves." They have inherited Israel's place as God's first-born (Ex. iv. 23). They will never, like Esau, barter away for any earthly prize their privileges as God's elder sons ; their names are entered on the roll as citizens of the city of God ; the Judge with whom it lies to admit or exclude is no tribal deity, but the God of all.

" There too you will have converse with the good men of ages gone by, perfected and satisfied at

last. You will meet too with Him who has made all this possible, who has led us to God, who has done so effectively for the New Covenant the work of mediation that Moses did so ineffectively for the Old Covenant; you will meet JESUS. The blood of Abel called for the ostracism of Cain; the blood, the offered life of Jesus, opens up man's way to God."

xii. 25–29

The measure of the graciousness of the New Covenant as compared with the former, of the pure and happy spiritual fellowship to which it calls, is the measure also of the added responsibility of those to whom it is offered (xii. 25). The author makes a characteristic use of a quotation from the prophecy of Haggai. In his second address to the people on the occasion of the rebuilding of the Temple, to which the prophet was urging them, he tries to encourage them by telling them that their oppressor, the Persian Empire, is about to be overthrown. God is about to "shake" the whole world and the nations (ii. 6f.). The Greek translation adds the word "again," which implies a previous shaking, which this author finds in the earthquake at the giving of the Sinai covenant.

In accordance with traditional apocalyptic expectations the author infers from the prophecy (or rather he uses the prophecy as a peg on which to hang his own expectation) that God is about to intervene in a world-shaking "catastrophe" in

which all merely created things, as belonging to the temporal order, will disappear, and only the world of eternal reality will remain. God's kingdom (he here falls back on Jesus' favourite designation of the coming ideal) cannot be shaken ; " My kingdom is not of this world " (John xviii. 36). " Let us receive this kingdom with gracious thanks, and so render to God the only worship which pleases Him ; with reverence such as Jesus Himself showed, without levity or familiarity, but with godly fear " (xii. 28f.).

There is a gloomy sternness about this chapter that is apt to repel a generation accustomed to hear God pictured as a weak, indulgent Father who spoils His children. The writer knew as we do not the men to whom he was writing, and the wise preacher puts the emphasis where it is most needed. The gospel that Jesus proclaimed to the outcast tax-gatherers and " sinners," when preached to men who are neither tax-gatherers nor " sinners," may easily produce sentimentalism, irreverence, and easy-going morals. The love of God, full of tender compassion for all struggling, tempted souls, is a " jealous " love, which takes the form of a " consuming fire " when its pleading is met with indifference by self-satisfied men who choose to go in their own ignoble way.

## CHAPTER XV

## THE EMOLUMENTS OF THE MINISTRY (xiii. 1–25)

The epistle closes with some practical ethical advice, in a form with which Paul's epistles have rendered us familiar. "Let love of the Christian brotherhood continue," that loving fellowship which had from the beginning been one of the distinguishing marks of the community, and which, as we learn both from Lucian and Tertullian, long continued to attract the attention of the non-Christians (xiii. 1).

"Do not forget to practise hospitality" (xiii. 2)—a maxim which the author justifies, not on the ground that they who do a kindness to the needy, however humble, do a kindness to Jesus, but rather with the plea that some hosts have unexpectedly found they were entertaining angels. Even in this argument he is thinking not of the story of Zacchæus or of Martha and Mary, but of such incidents as that of Abraham and Lot recorded in Genesis xviii. and xix., or the story of the parents of Samson in Judges xiii.

In an age when Christians travelled frequently on Church business or on their own affairs, the

question how to find a lodging in a strange town would continually present itself. The way in which idolatry insinuates itself into every detail of the life, especially into food questions, would make it in many places advisable, if not as imperative as in modern India, for Christians to live only with Christians. The public inns had their temptations for men and their dangers for women, as well as the public serais. Hence hospitality, especially to travelling Christians, became as prominent a virtue among the early Christians as in the mission Churches of our own day. The author assumes that his readers are already practising this virtue, and asks only that they do not lower their standards.

One of the splendid chapters in the early history of Christianity is that which tells of the loving attention lavished by Christians on their fellow-Christians in prison, especially those imprisoned for the faith—a practice which partly owed its origin to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew xxv. 35ff. and partly was a natural expression of Christian feeling. Gaolers were even bribed to allow Christians access to fellow-Christian prisoners, and sometimes gaolers were so impressed that of their own accord they allowed Christians to communicate with their friends in gaol. Origen in his youth, like Dinah Morris in a later day, stayed by condemned Christians till they reached the place of execution. These practices the author commends

to his readers. "Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, the persecuted as being yourselves in the body and subject to like trials" (xiii. 3).[1]

"Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let wedlock be kept pure" (xiii. 4). If there is any reference here to ascetic disparagement of marriage (1 Tim. iv. 3) that is not the prominent thought. "For God will judge all breaches of marriage law, whether within or without the marriage relationship." The demand for absolute moral purity in sexual relations was from the beginning, and still is wherever Christianity spreads, a distinguishing mark of the religion. Very early in the history of the Church exaggerated demands for moral purity gave rise to those ascetic ideals that produced the monastic system, which for good or evil played so large a part in the life of the mediæval Church.

"Let love of money have no place in your character" (xiii. 5), a maxim which in one form or other was constantly on the lips of Jesus—advice particularly appropriate for men who at any moment might be despoiled of all their possessions. "Contentment with what you have" was taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount; here it is urged on the same ground: God will take care of His children as well as of the birds and flowers. As usual, the author makes no reference to the words

[1] Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, English translation, I. 201ff.

of Jesus, but finds his text (xiii. 6) in the Old Testament, in the passage in which Moses promises his people God's help in the conquest of Canaan. "I will not desert you nor abandon you" (Deut. xxxi. 6, 8). "We may then, in the words of the Psalmist, exulting after a military victory, exclaim: 'God is my helper; I shall not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Psa. cxviii. 6).

Next, apparently with some recollection of a passage in the "Wisdom of Solomon" that deals with the bearing of a righteous man in the face of persecution and death, he tells them (xiii. 7) to call to mind their former "leaders" (as usual he calls them by no more official title). These leaders earned their gratitude by proclaiming to them the Gospel of God's word. They died like men (possibly a martyr's death). They were men of that vision which in this epistle is called "faith." It would be well if the readers were like them.

Christian belief, and in a measure Christian practice, vary from age to age: Jesus Christ Himself never varies (xiii. 8). He is "the same yesterday" (in the days of His flesh, or perhaps, in His pre-incarnate days), "and to-day" (the present day of grace) "and for ever" (after the dissolution of all earthly things). This memorable tribute to the unchanging Christ, which may be taken from a creed formula of the day, introduces a section to which the author obviously attaches importance, but to which unfortunately we have lost the key.

He is warning against various novel theories, and urging that grace makes a better nourishment for the heart than " foods." " Our altar," he says, " is one of which those who minister at the tabernacle " (still using the language of ancient Jewish ritual, and meaning either worshippers or priests) " have no right to eat." In his discussion of the question of a paid ministry Paul had used a phrase almost exactly similar (1 Cor. ix. 4, 13). Paul had employed as an argument for the support of a missionary by the Church he founds, the fact that " men whose work is the service of the temple ritual eat of the temple sacrifices." How would the argument sound on the assumption that this author uses the words with the same meaning ?

" Some of you think too much about food, too little about grace. Men who are always thinking of their salary get little benefit from their anxiety. It is true that under the old ritual the priests had their perquisites, which included (according to Num. xviii. 8ff.) all things offered in sacrifice, *except in so far as they were burnt.* This exception however covered the case of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. The animals offered alike for high priest and people are so ' holy ' that it would be dangerous for the priests to eat them ; and so, after their blood is offered, their carcases are burnt ' outside the camp ' (Lev. xvi. 27). The sacrifice on the Day of Atonement is the very offering

which foreshadowed the one Christian sacrifice. Even in the detail just mentioned, the sacrifice of Jesus was true to its parabolic form. Jesus, the great New Testament sacrifice, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, though it is true His body was not burnt, yet suffered outside the camp, outside the Holy City." The ancient rule, based doubtless on fear of defilement, that executions should take place outside the city, worked into God's purpose, as did the advice of Caiaphas (John xi. 49–52).

There are no perquisites, then, for followers of Jesus, but only shame and ostracism. "Let us go forth to Him" (xiii. 13), "outside the camp, outside the range of all those interests and ambitions that other men call life, carrying His reproach, even as He went forth carrying His cross" (John xix. 17). "These pecuniary thoughts would be in place for men who were to live for ever as men of the world; but our citizenship is in the world to come." (That Christians, like the patriarchs, only *seek after* the city is one more proof that for the author the "coming age" has not yet fully come.)

This interpretation rises naturally out of the discussion of the ritual regulations that form the text of so large a part of the epistle, and is in harmony with the warning against love of money in xiii. 5. It may help also to explain the advice (xiii. 16) to the readers to be willing to share what they had, and it is compatible with the directions

in xiii. 17 : "Obey your spiritual rulers (even if you do not grant all their claims)." We know too from 1 Corinthians ix. that such questions arose at a very early period in the history of the Church.[1]

(It is just possible that the passage is aimed against a literal interpretation of "This is My body," such as we find in John vi. 52—an interpretation which has played so large a part in the history of sacramentarianism. This does not seem to suit the context so well. Another suggestion is that the polemic is against the liberty which may have been claimed, as it was claimed in Corinth, for Christians to partake of sacrificial meals of religions other than their own.)

The immediate sequel gives support to the idea that the question at issue was that of emoluments for services rendered to the Church. "Through Him (Jesus) let us offer a sacrifice of praise continually to God" (xiii. 15). "Sacrifice of praise" was the technical term for the thankoffering of the Levitical law. In Leviticus vii. 12ff., where the directions for it are given, the priest's portion is defined with some care. The phrase is used by the author of Psalm lx., who teaches (3f.) that God wants real prayer and gratitude instead of (or, perhaps, in addition to) animal sacrifices. As Hosea said (xiv. 3 in the Greek version), what God wants is "the fruit" not of our barnyards, but "of our lips."

[1] Cf. the warning in 1 Peter v. 2.

In Isaiah lvii. 19 "fruit of the lips" seems to be used almost as a technical term for thanksgiving. "To do good," says the author, as Jesus did good (Acts x. 38), to "share" as a member of the Christian commonwealth, these are the sacrifices that will win God's favour, as Abel's did.

It is noteworthy that Paul acknowledges a gift from the Philippian Christians in language strikingly similar. He calls it "an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. iv. 18). It may well be that, just as Paul claimed the right to be supported by the Corinthian Christians and then chose to earn his own living, this writer, while denying the claim of their teachers to support, yet urges his readers to make voluntary contributions. (The support of prophets and teachers by "first-fruits" is inculcated in Didache xiii.). Christ, then, as well as the Levitical high priests, had something to offer, namely Himself. His followers also have something to offer, namely "thanksgiving" and "generous kindness."

Obedience and submission to their present rulers is next enjoined, possibly but not necessarily with the underlying suggestion that there had been some friction—obedience to their authoritative teaching, submission to their discipline. "They keep sleepless vigilance, as Jesus told His disciples to do (Mark xiii. 33), but for your souls, not their own, as men who know they will have to give an account of their stewardship. If it is

a pitiful, not a joyful, account they have to give, so much the worse for you" (xiii. 17).

Next, as Paul sometimes does with his correspondents (Rom. xv. 30f.; 1 Thess. v. 25), the author asks for the prayers of his readers—their continued prayers. "Anxious in all things to live a good life, I persuade myself that I have a good conscience." (Was his absence from them connected with some charge brought against him either by the Christians or by the civil power?) He specially desires their prayers that he may be speedily restored to them (xiii. 18f.).

In the concluding prayer (xiii. 20f.) the author has in mind the passage in Isaiah lxiii., where the prophet, after calling to mind Jehovah's redeeming love for His people ("No envoy nor angel but Himself saved them, because He loved them and spared them; Himself redeemed them and took them up and bore them on high all through the age"), recalls how Israel rejected His love and grieved His Holy Spirit, and then goes on to sing:

> "Then (Israel) remembered
> The days of the old time, (and said),
> 'Where is He that brought up from the sea
> The shepherd of His flock?
> And where is He that set
> In their midst His holy spirit?'"[1]

A sentence in the Gospel narrative like "He had pity on them because they were as shepherd-

[1] Isa. lxiii. 11. (*Isaiah in Modern Speech*, by J. E. McFadyen.)

less sheep" (Mark vi. 34) doubtless prepared the way for the Johannine conception of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, even if there had been no more definite traditional basis for it.

Surely this author had the whole apposite passage of Isaiah in mind when he prayed: "May the God of peace" (of the safety that follows God's victory over His enemies) "who has brought up," not from the sea, but "from the dead" (the only direct reference in the epistle to the resurrection of Jesus), not the shepherd Moses, but "that great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord," great as a shepherd as He was as a high priest, "in the potency of the blood of the eternal covenant," which was the theme of the central portion of the epistle, (may this God) "equip you with every requisite to do His will" (as all through the New Testament, this is the supreme end of religion), "effecting in you through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever, what is well-pleasing to Him." (As in Phil. ii. 13, the divine purpose without human co-operation is as powerless to secure men's salvation as the human will without divine help.)

Next follows a modest request (*v.* 22) that they will take in good part his letter, which, quite correctly, though contrary to the common impression of its nature, he describes as an "appeal"—a word of mingled encouragement and warning. His description of it as a *brief* epistle is again literally correct, though it does not harmonise with the impression

one gets from a study of the literature on the epistle.

" I have to tell you that our (Christian) brother Timothy has been set free " (or possibly " has set out "). " If he comes soon, I shall see you along with him " (xiii. 23)—a sentence which has raised the question : If he was to be present with his readers in person so soon, why this elaborate epistle ? But surely in any case his message was worth committing to writing, and no student of the epistle will suggest that verbal supplements by the author were superfluous.

" Greet the leaders and the members of all the congregations in the city as well as your own. The Italian Christians who are beside me send their greetings. May grace be with you all " (xiii. 24f.).

## CHAPTER XVI

## A PREACHER'S TEXTS

If questions of Introduction with regard to the epistle "to the Hebrews" are difficult or impossible to answer, the corresponding questions about "The Epistle of James" are even more baffling. This document has even less claim to be called an "epistle" than that sent "to the Hebrews." It closes abruptly with no salutations of any kind. At the beginning the author plunges into his subject in the second sentence, and almost the only indication that we may be dealing with an "epistle" is the opening greeting, which consists of less than two lines. This greeting is sent by "James, slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," and is addressed to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion"; which, on the assumption that the document is sent by a Christian to Christians, presumably means the whole scattered Church of Christ. Moreover, in the body of the writing there is hardly any indication that the author has in view the particular circumstances of some local community.

As a form of literature the "epistle" had had a long history before the Christian era, and it was adopted in the Church almost from the beginning. There are many parallels in Paul's epistles to the brief practical maxims of James; but whereas this "letter" is wholly composed of such maxims, in Paul's writings they form for the most part an appendix to the epistle proper. The author does not profess to be an apologete, and only in a very minor degree is he a thinker. First and last he is a preacher; and his preaching takes the form of short, pithy utterances of concentrated experience. It is true that his maxims tend to be arranged in groups, and that within each group there is a certain consecution of ideas; but his preaching is always rather a series of texts than a sermon.

The analogy which first suggests itself is that of the Jewish "Wisdom" literature, of which "Proverbs" is the best-known example; but in "James" there is little of that careful balancing of parallel or contrasted clauses with which we are familiar in "Proverbs"; nor in this book does a personified Wisdom talk down to the readers as "my son." The writer addresses his readers as "my brothers," speaking as one of themselves. The document seems to belong to these records of popular preaching known as "diatribes."

About the author nothing is certainly known beyond the fact that he calls himself James. In

view of the tendency of the early Church to estimate the importance of its documents by the ecclesiastical position of their authors, it was natural that in the course of time the idea should arise that this James was the Lord's brother. For that belief there seems to be no evidence of any weight. The tradition is very unconvincing, and leaves unanswered the question : If this " letter " was really written by a brother of Jesus, why had it so long and difficult a passage to canonicity ? Its position in the Canon does not seem to have been definitely established till about the end of the fourth century.

As for the evidence of the " letter " itself, in our almost complete ignorance of the facts we may well hesitate to say dogmatically that a brother of Jesus could not have written Greek so good as this (assuming that he could write Greek at all) ; or that one who knew Jesus intimately, and afterwards became a follower, could not have addressed to the Church a manual of instruction in which Jesus is left so much in the background. This we can say however, that both in language and in substance the " epistle " is largely different from what we should have expected from James, the Lord's brother, in his Christian days. It hardly seems profitable to discuss a theory for which the historical basis is so slender.

Of this document alone among New Testament writings is it possible to raise the question whether

it is a Christian document at all. We are all familiar with Luther's verdict that it is a "right strawy" epistle on the ground that it does not "preach and urge Christ." But the difficulty is greater than that; Jesus is hardly mentioned at all. His name occurs only twice, in the opening verses of the first two chapters; and in the second of these references the grammar is so unusual and so difficult, the sentence would read so much more smoothly if it were left out, that the theory that it formed no part of the original writing is not to be turned down without enquiry.

Again, when the author wants an illustration of patient suffering, he turns not to Jesus but to Job. He points his moral of the power of prayer, not from the teaching of Jesus, but from the example of Elijah. Outside of this epistle the death and resurrection of Jesus may be said to form the kernel of the New Testament; neither of them is mentioned in this "epistle." There is no clear indication of that sense of indebtedness to Jesus which so filled the minds of Paul and the authors of "Hebrews" and "1 Peter." In iv. 5 we have the only reference to the Holy Spirit, and that a doubtful reference, occurring in a Scripture quotation the source of which cannot be traced and the meaning of which is by no means clear. Some of these difficulties may have explanations, but taken together they are very puzzling.

One has to grant also that many phrases in the

"letter" which are capable of a Christian interpretation are ambiguous and are equally susceptible of a Jewish interpretation. The Christian "synagogue" (ii. 2), which presumably means a Christian "meeting," more often indicates a Jewish "place of meeting." "James" does not use the word "faith" in any distinctively Christian sense. "The perfect law of freedom" (i. 25) would not have been an impossible phrase in the mouth of a pious Jew. "The noble name which is called over you" (ii. 7) on Christian lips would be the name of Jesus; coming from a Jew the phrase would be a familiar designation of God. When Paul uses the word "Lord" it is sometimes difficult or impossible to know whether he means God or Jesus. In "James" we cannot be quite certain that by "the Lord" he ever means Jesus. When he says of the sick man, "the Lord will raise him up" (v. 15), it is most natural to suppose that "the Lord" is God. If we assume that we are dealing with a Christian document, "the parousia of the Lord" in v. 8 presumably refers to the second coming of Jesus, but the literature seems to suggest that it might mean "the coming of the Lord of Hosts"; and in verses 10 and 11 of the same chapter, three times "the Lord" means God.

In spite of all this, it is quite incorrect to say that our belief that the "epistle of James" is a Christian document depends altogether on the phrase in the opening salutation, "a slave of the

Lord Jesus Christ." The writer's maxims constantly sound like echoes of the teaching of Jesus, especially of the Sermon on the Mount. His prohibition of oaths, "Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' 'no'" (v. 12), may well be a more faithful account of the words of Jesus than the form in Matt. v. 37 : "Let your language be 'yes, yes,' 'no, no.'" The discussion of the relative value of faith and works does not seem to be satisfactorily explained, except on the supposition that Paul's exaltation of faith and depreciation of ritual "works" had in some circles given rise to a natural but unfortunate misunderstanding.

Our conviction that the author is a Christian writing for Christians is based not only on the frequent reminiscences of Jesus' teaching, but on the lofty Christian tone which is sustained throughout. There seems indeed to be only one thought in the epistle out of touch with the mind of Jesus. In iv. 14 the readers are compared to "a vapour, appearing for a little, then disappearing." This sense of the insignificance of life corresponds to one strain of Old Testament thought ; but it is untrue to the healthy insistence of Jesus on the worth and dignity of life. There is no attempt to reproduce the teaching of Jesus in its many-sidedness. We are in the atmosphere of the Sermon on the Mount, with its ethical teaching and its frank dealing with shams ; or of the denunciation of the selfish rich, or of the scribes

and Pharisees ; not of the parable of the prodigal. But within these limits we have the work of a virile mind which has caught the spirit of Jesus, of that part of His teaching especially which did so much to alienate from Him the men of influence among His people and to bring about the final catastrophe.

While the writer's mind is steeped in Jewish thought and in Christian thought, there is nothing whatever to suggest that he was in the technical sense a Jewish Christian. For him "the works of the law" are a moral life, not adherence to a ritual. There is no trace of any of the controversies that arose when Gentiles were first admitted to the Church. It would seem as if these controversies had never arisen for writer or readers (an impossible supposition if the author had been a Jewish Christian leader of the first generation), or else they had been settled so long ago and so effectively that the controversy had for them hardly even an historic interest.

Assuming that the "epistle" was written by a Christian for Christians, the comparative lack of unambiguous references to Jesus and to distinctively Christian teaching must always remain something of a riddle. Yet in this respect it is comparable to many Christian sermons preached in our own day. Moreover, on the side of practical ethics, which alone is dealt with in this document, Christianity carried on, though it also enriched and deepened, the teaching accepted—at least in theory—

by the finer types of Judaism. Discussions of the nature of this "epistle" have tended to proceed on the assumption that the author wrote it, so to speak, at a sitting. Of the diatribe of all forms of literature, this can never be a correct account. Such a production, whatever may have been the time occupied in the actual penmanship, is the result of long years of experience and reflection, the author's ripe wisdom being in turn indebted to that of preceding ages. Even if author and readers were alike Christians, it may well be that he had given much of this teaching in his pre-Christian days.

Considerations of the same kind are often forgotten in discussing the date of the document. On this subject opinions of the widest variety have been held, the date being placed as early as the middle of the first century or as late as the middle of the second. Acceptance of a very late date is largely determined by the belief that the religious, and especially the social, conditions reflected in "James" are such as could not have arisen in any section of the Church in the first or second Christian generations. There is, we are told, in this epistle no sign of the enthusiasm of a Church in the raptures of its first love.

Moreover, the prevalence of ambition, of strife—even murderous strife—of the unscrupulous tyranny of wealth and power over poverty, are all, we are told, marks of an age of decadent Christianity.

The evidence of contemporary literature is also adduced to show that the atmosphere is that of the middle of the second century rather than of any earlier date. Thus in the Shepherd of Hermas (Vision III. ix. 6ff.) we read : "See to it, when you rejoice in your wealth, that the destitute may not groan, and their groans go up to the Lord. . . . Therefore I speak now to the leaders of the Church and to those 'who take the chief seats'. . . . You are hardened and will not cleanse your hearts. See to it therefore, children, that these disagreements do not rob you of your life. . . ."

These arguments are not very convincing. The New Testament does not contradict the evidence of modern missionary experience, that a young Church is not always an enthusiastic Church. Moreover, the heartless rich men whom James denounces are not necessarily Christians. Even if the "letter" were written by a Christian for Christians, the writer was not debarred, any more than Jesus was, from using accumulated experience. There is no need to suppose that the sins he discusses were specially characteristic of any branch of the Church, much less of the whole Church of the age. Even if he had concrete cases in view, the example of Corinth is sufficient to show that a low moral standard does not always imply a long Christian past, nor is it easy to see why anyone should suppose that it does. Perhaps the most that we can say is that the supposition of a late

date accounts for more of the phenomena than that of an earlier date.

The history of the epistle does not shed much light on the subject, since, while there are parallels to " James " as early as Clement of Rome (in the middle of the last decade of the first Christian century), the question rises which was indebted to the other or whether both were indebted to some common source. The first definite reference to the epistle seems to come from Origen in the third century. All that it seems safe to say is that the document is an ethical tractate, written by a Greek-speaking Christian teacher who had been brought up in a Jewish atmosphere but had some acquaintance with Hellenistic literature, and that it was addressed to the scattered Christian Church.

## CHAPTER XVII

## THE TONGUE AND OTHER PERILS

If the epistle of James had great difficulty in establishing its place in the Canon and was long looked at askance, it stands there now in its own right. It is the work of a brave, strong mind, with a type of religion altogether sane and wholesome. The leaders of the Church recognised from the first that Christianity was not only a faith, but a faith issuing in a life. James, while accepting the faith, concentrates on the life. One can imagine that he might have found himself somewhat out of place at a conference on the reunion of Christendom, when he found that the principal subjects of discussion were "faith" and "order," neither of which, if we may judge from this product of his pen, had any fascination for him.

Yet if Christianity is ever to find a basis of reunion, it is much more likely to be the simple faith and difficult ethic of James than any interpretation of Pauline theology or of the creeds, that relegates to a subordinate position the Christian life, which is the only justification of our creeds and our organisation. This manly piece of ripe

wisdom should make a special appeal to the piety of the youth of our day, impatient as it so often is of irrelevant discussions that lead nowhere ; and it is unfortunate that the form in which the "epistle" is cast—an obsolete form, like that of most of the New Testament writings—is a hindrance to a ready appreciation of its message.

Considerations of space make it impossible to do more than reproduce some of the leading thoughts of the "epistle."

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"Do not call your trials 'troubles.' Receive them with a cheer. They are really 'trials,' tests of character. A genuine faith in God will help you to meet them with that steadfastness without which there can be no all-round character" (i. 2–4, 12).

. . . . .

"Life," says James, "is a difficult business." He modestly suggests the possibility that someone may lack "wisdom," an intelligent appreciation of the problems of life and how they are to be met. James knows very well that we all lack this wisdom. "God alone can give us the light we need to guide us among the pitfalls of life. To live without prayer and without God, seeking none of the help that God is so ready to give, especially through His Word, is to stumble along a dark and dangerous road without a lamp." This "epistle" reminds

us that God often uses intermediaries in bestowing His gift of wisdom—a student of life and of the Word like James, for example. Those who sever their connection with the visible Church of Christ are in effect intimating that they feel no need of the help of a teaching ministry (i. 5–8, 16–18).

. . . . .

Is goodness worth while? It is a question which we are often told we have no right to ask, but which every normally constituted man will ask nevertheless, and which the New Testament consistently treats as a reasonable question. Are we living in a world based on goodness, or is goodness an alien in the universe, engaged in an unequal contest with the constitution of things, and foredoomed to failure?

"God is a whole-hearted giver who comes to the help of our weakness and never taunts us with the gift." With the simplicity of Jesus Himself, James is convinced that nothing that is not good, no imperfect gift, can come from God. The God in whom James believes will never mock us, giving us a stone for a loaf or a serpent for a fish. It is His joy to satisfy our worthy longings and fulfil our noble aspirations. The world of that age—as indeed of most ages—lived in fear of the stars. "God is the Father of the heavenly bodies. They wax and wane, are overshadowed and cast shadows, symbols of the change and shadow that pervade

our lives. But God abides, the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever." Whatever else may be said of this faith, James, like Jesus, knew the facts of life that make it difficult to hold it. He knew, for example, that the unscrupulous rich man often seems master of the situation ; but with patience we shall see that God is watching and biding His time (i. 5–8, 17 ; v. 1–7).

. . . . .

" God will have no half-hearted men. You must trust Him and follow Him, all in all or not at all. The man who believes in God ' to a certain extent,' the ' semi-Christian,' can never live a purposeful life. Having no goal, he never ' gets anywhere.' God wants the clean in hand, the pure of heart, the man who will trust God though He slay him." The ideal of Jesus too, was the life with the rock foundation, the ploughman who ploughs with his eye on the mark. But did James know of Jesus' belief in the efficacy of faith as a grain of mustard-seed ; of His response to " I believe ; help my unbelief " ? Did he realise the significance of the pagan reproach of the Christians that their Gospel was for the unclean of hand and the impure of heart ? (i. 6–8 ; iv. 8).

. . . . .

" When we are tempted to sin, it is unmanly to blame God " (we should add " or to blame society or heredity "). " There is no point of contact

betwen God and evil. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Whatever the philosophy of temptation may be, in the last resort every honest man recognises that temptation is what he makes of it. To allow temptation to lure us out of our stronghold is to commit moral suicide. Desire yielded to is the mother of Sin ; Sin come to maturity is the mother of death " (i. 13–15).

. . . . .

" Every man should be a good listener " ; should be willing to listen to explanations, to petitions, to both sides of a question, to wiser men than himself (i. 19).

. . . . .

" Righteous indignation is usually self-deception " (i. 19, 20).

. . . . .

" Fine words are not enough. Pious talk puts no coat on the poor man's back and no food in his larder " (i. 22–25 ; ii. 14–17).

. . . . .

" God's law is an imperial law, meant for freemen, not for slaves. We cannot live it unless we give to it earnest, concentrated study, not a passing occasional glance such as a man gives to his own face in a mirror " (i. 22–25).

. . . . .

" Fine worship is not enough. The true worship consists in being kind to widows and orphans,

and in keeping oneself from the defilements of the world "—a "world" which has come to mean the elements in life that are hostile to God. James does not discuss the relation of this conception of the world to temptation (i. 26, 27).

. . . . .

"A fine appearance is no guarantee of worth. If you insult a poor man who comes to visit your Christian meeting, and toady to another visitor who is obviously well-to-do, you are forgetting one of the fundamental principles of Christianity. According to the teaching of Christianity" (alone, it is claimed, of all religions), "God has actually chosen the poor as heirs of the kingdom." In Corinth, and presumably in many of the other Churches, the first congregations were apparently largely composed of slaves, freedmen, and the poor (ii. 1–9).

Do we find it much easier to-day than they did in the days of James to turn a blind eye to the rich man's gold ring, or its modern equivalent, the cheque-book; to the tattered raiment of the poor man, or its modern equivalent, the "copper" collection? The Church has in some measure caught the spirit of the Master. Perhaps nothing in the life of the Christian Church in India impresses the Hindu quite so much as the sight of converts from the "untouchable" classes received in the Church on absolutely equal terms with

Brahmin converts, even if with less éclat. There are various indications in the New Testament of the surprise with which the Jew discovered that the racial distinctions he drew had no counterpart in the mind of God, that God is no "respecter of persons." The power to study other men with our mental vision undistorted by the externals of their lives, the capacity even to recognise just what of the things that attract or repel us in others *are* externals, seems to be one of the last achievements of Christian insight.

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"We must not pick and choose among the commandments, exaggerating the importance of those we are least inclined to disobey. The law is an indivisible whole. A breach of any 'commandment' is a proof of unfaithfulness to the imperial law of love" (ii. 10–13).

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"An orthodox creed is not enough. The only creed that counts is that which expresses itself in a righteous life." Apparently Paul's formula, "faith, not works," had led to antinomianism. Whether James was conscious of the fact or not, the position he attacks had nothing in common with Paul's teaching. By "faith" James means creed; Paul's "faith" was a surrender of the soul to God in Jesus. By "works" Paul means the demands of the law, including its ritual requirements; for

James "works" are Christian conduct. James has only one test of orthodoxy, usually about the last test the Church has thought of applying: What kind of character does it produce? "Creed divorced from conduct is a corpse as much as a body divorced from spirit." Nor will James allow the plea that one man specialises in faith, another in conduct. The distinction is as unreal as that commonly drawn between the devotional spirit of Mary and the service of Martha (ii. 14–26).

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"Do not all want to be teachers." The teachers, who were not exactly officials, played a large part in the life of the early Church, as we learn even from the New Testament. The respect paid to these teachers, and the fact that they lived at the expense of the Church, doubtless gave the position a certain attraction in the minds of some. Other aspirants would be tempted by the influence that the teacher exercised and by the love of hearing the sound of their own voices. "Only shallow natures will enter light-heartedly on the work of guiding the minds of others, especially on life's deepest questions. Our condemnation if we fail is in proportion to our responsibility" (iii. 1, 2). The moral standards of our day are largely formed by school-teachers, politicians, and journalists. Would that the first verse of this third chapter of "James" could be burned into the minds of

all who arrogate to themselves the position of teacher !

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" The perils of the teacher are only a special illustration of the perils of the tongue. The tongue is an infallible indicator of the state of the spiritual health. There are men who can subdue every passion, but who cannot subdue their tongues. A foul or an uncontrolled tongue is like a fire, fed by the flames of hell, which will kindle a conflagration the limits of whose destructive capacity no man can foresee. The tongue is an anarchic power. Its poison is as fatal as the cobra's, bringing death to purity, to peace, to reputation." Words can turn faith into cynicism, hope into despair, love into suspicion and malice.

" It is easy when we pronounce God's name to say ' Blessed be He ! ' as the Jews do. If we curse men who are made in God's image, that, and not our doxology, shows our real thought of God, just as if we taste brackish water we know that the spring from which it comes is altogether foul." Well may James say that the good man is an unwilling speaker (i. 19 ; iii. 6–12).

James has nothing to say of the power of the tongue to spread truth, to inspire hope and courage. He does not remind us that Jesus was the Word, and that " the word " became a technical term for the Gospel. Like his Master, he emphasises the

side of truth that most needs to be emphasised. Black as is the picture he draws, he does not exaggerate the power of the tongue to corrupt innocence, to blast reputations, to breed suspicion and mistrust, to destroy souls. His point is that much of the pettiness and foulness of human nature would at least end with themselves if only we could prevent their expression in speech.

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"A good life, especially a humble life, is the hall-mark of ripe wisdom" (almost equal to "piety"). "Fanatical zeal, selfish ambition, and arrogance are a sure sign that one has not got the truth. Religion of this kind is of the earth, not of heaven; of man's lower nature, not from his spiritual nature; from demons, not from God" (iii. 13–15).

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"True pacifism deals not with war and strife, but with the passions that lead to war and strife: the greed that will not hesitate at murder if it is not satisfied, the ambition that will fling nations at each other's throats rather than fail of its aim. Some men even pray for the means to have their sensual impulses satisfied, and are surprised when their prayers are not answered" (iii. 16–iv. 3).

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"Beware of the desire for popularity. The world's friend is God's enemy. For a Christian

to be at home in the world is spiritual adultery" (iv. 4–6).

In "James" the great choice, the either-or, is as clear-cut as it is in the teaching of Jesus. In his way of expressing it he is more in line with a certain development of Judaism than with the general trend of Jesus' teaching. To Jesus the material world is God's world; it abounds in evidences of God's love and care. Even the human world Jesus neither feared nor taught His followers to fear. He sought out and welcomed those who, judged by the world's standards, were most estranged from God and most likely to estrange from God those who had contact with them.

Even in the earlier part of the fourth Gospel the teaching is that God loves the human world and longs for its salvation. But the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, the part played in the tragedy by Pharisee, scribe and Sadducee, by Jewish political power in the person of Herod and Roman in the person of Pilate, and the later persecutions of Christians in Palestine and outside, had changed all this. It seemed as if all the world were arrayed against God's Son and His followers. In the later chapters of John's Gospel, as earlier in Paul's writings and also in "James," "the world" becomes the very embodiment of all in life that is opposed to God and to Jesus. On the more optimistic view of the future of Christianity, progress will be measured by the extent to

which the opposition between God and "the world" loses its sharpness.

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"Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Is not this, with all its virility, less gracious than the picture of the shepherd who goes out after his sheep and seeks it till he finds it? (iv. 7, 8).

"Loss and persecution suffered for conscience' sake, a becoming sense of our own shortcomings, a heart that sympathises with the sorrows and failures of others, are more becoming than the laughter of revelry, ill-gotten gains and ungodly triumph" (iv. 9). We seem to have here a reminiscence of the first three beatitudes, as the following verse, "Humble yourselves before God and He will exalt you," seems to be an echo of the familiar saying of Jesus in Luke xiv. 11.

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"Our criticisms are only uninstructed and often ill-natured opinions, coming from men who themselves continually break the law and counting for nothing. The issues of life and death are in the hands of God Who gave the law." The critic often reveals more of himself than of the person (or thing) he criticises. Further, when we are guilty of unkindly criticism of our brother, we assume in the first place that we know enough about our brother's circumstances to entitle us to judge him,

which we usually do not. We assume also that we are the repository of the moral standards which decide his fate ; that is to say, we put ourselves in the place of God as represented by His law. Our age claims the right to examine the validity of moral laws however venerable, and social institutions however hoary with age. Yet in all our study of them we must give due weight to the accumulated experience of ages which, under divine guidance, has given us our codes and institutions. Superficial and light-hearted criticism, which ignores the facts and refuses to study history, can lead only to anarchy. Moreover, this warning against judging one's neighbour is meant to protect from injustice, not to embolden to vice. Every life is subject to a criticism far more effective than any "brother" can give—often a tragic criticism, the judgment of life itself, the judgment of God, as James calls it (iv. 11, 12).

This paragraph presumably has in view the controversies of a period in which ancient standards are being found insufficient to meet the needs of a new age that probes deeper and has a wider outlook. It is a useful warning against the excesses that are apt to characterise such an epoch, but underestimates the power of an enlightened public opinion to raise the moral level of a whole people.

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"In making your plans for the future do not arrogantly forget," as the rich fool forgot, "that

life ends in death and that we are all in the hands of God" (iv. 13, 16).

To characterise as "arrogance" the making of plans for the future without an explicit "if the Lord will" (the equivalent of the Mahommedan *inshallah*) strikes the modern reader as more heathen than Christian. That the formation of every project for the future should be made the occasion of a *memento mori* suggests a morbid outlook on life which we do not associate with Jesus. Yet everyone who has seen ambitious schemes, especially schemes for self-aggrandisement, frustrated by the hand of death, knows that the humility which James inculcates is true wisdom, the remembrance in all our shaping of our lives what a small part of the plan we see.

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"Shortlived is the happiness of you men whose one aim is to get rich, and whose path to wealth is through the agony and tears of those who work for you. The rust of your unused possessions will be a witness against you. God has heard the cry of the workmen whose wages you have kept back. Your fatness is that of cattle whose day of slaughter has come" (v. 1–6).

In the economic system of the age, capital played a relatively small part in production; so that accumulations of wealth rendered their owner liable to the charge of selfishness. The principal

forms of private wealth were stores of foodstuffs, expensive garments, and the precious metals. The chief weapon the powerful man had for becoming rich at the expense of the poor was the withholding of the wages of his workmen.

That the perishableness of wealth should have so deeply impressed the moralists of the time was only natural. It was reserved for later ages to discover means by which wealthy men can keep their possessions in a form which almost defies the possibility of loss. To that extent some of the social teaching of the New Testament requires to be rewritten. James's main point remains unshakeable. God is against all unbrotherliness in the way in which men make or use their money, is against those who in the struggle for fortune use their fellow-men as pawns in the game. James acknowledges, as we all have to acknowledge, that for a time a rich man can press on to the satisfaction of his own ambitions, ignoring the claims of his fellow-workers and his fellow-citizens, forgetting that they are human beings like himself, who can think and feel and hope, who can suffer and enjoy. The rich man can do this. James has the faith which he inherits from Jewish prophets as well as from Jesus, that he cannot do it with impunity. God hears the anguished cry of the oppressed as He heard the cry of the blood of the murdered Abel. In a vivid image he pictures the rust of a man's superfluous and idle gold and silver cor-

rupting and consuming his flesh. (In a note, apparently intended to be taken seriously, Windisch suggests that the author, belonging to the lower classes, was not aware that the precious metals, speaking generally, are not susceptible to rust !)

James is pleading here in the first place for elementary justice, for the payment of wages which have been earned. There is also a suggestion of the deeper feeling that merely to possess superfluous wealth in a world where others have not the bare necessaries of life is to sow the seeds of one's own destruction. The passage parallels some of the fine humanitarian passages in the Old Testament prophets. It is well that it found a place in the New Testament, whose prophets, preoccupied with the things of the spirit and believing that the coming of the Lord was at hand (see even here v. 5), were inclined to undervalue the importance of questions of social justice.

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" Be patient in your troubles and do not blame each other " (the special temptation of harassed men). " The Old Testament is largely a record of hardship and persecution bravely endured. God's great pity may be hidden for a time ; in the end it shines clear. Besides, your troubles are nearly over ; the Lord is at hand " (v. 7–11).

We cannot now console ourselves with this last reflection ; but the record of nineteen more

centuries of suffering endured with patience and fortitude "in the name of the Lord"—suffering crowned with the "great pity and mercy" of the Lord—has more than taken its place.

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"The man who always speaks the truth has no need to use strong language" (v. 12).

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"Let your feelings find their natural expression—prayer in a time of trouble, songs of praise when things are going well. In a case of illness send for the Church leaders. Mutual confession, united prayer, and simple remedies will bring forgiveness and recovery. A good man's prayer has great influence, as we learn from the story of Elijah" (v. 13–18). This section reminds us that the passage iii. 2ff. is not the whole truth about the tongue. The simple faith and piety that inspire the advice witness to the futility of basing on these words guidance as to the function of modern Church officials, recondite theories of prayer, or mystical teaching on the efficacy of oil, medicinal or sacramental.

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"He who rescues a brother that has gone astray has done for him a service beyond all computing. It is not only that his sins are forgiven, but his soul is saved from DEATH" (v. 19, 20). The under-

lying idea is that of the concluding section of the parable of the prodigal, where the return of the younger brother, forlorn figure that he was, became an occasion of boundless rejoicing, because it made all the difference between life and death. The question has been discussed whether James means that the soul that is " saved " is that of the wanderer or of the man who brings him back. Later literature seems to suggest that success in " converting " a sinner was regarded as one way of saving one's own soul, but that is not a New Testament idea.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## AN APOSTLE OF HOPE

The First Epistle of Peter is one of the so-called Catholic Epistles, and it has some claim to the description, though it is definitely addressed to Christians in Asia Minor. The letter purports to be written by "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." This is usually understood to refer to the Peter of the Gospel tradition; and while there are certain difficulties in the way of this theory of authorship, no convincing evidence seems to have been brought forward by those who reject it.

We are reminded that in the beginning of our era and for long afterwards it was customary to try to win for a new publication a spurious influence by attaching to it the name of some leader of the past. It may be true that this practice was recognised as permissible in the literary moral code of the day, yet it is obvious that these false ascriptions of authorship could have value only so long as the reading public could be induced to accept them. While "forgery," with its modern associations, may be too strong a word to apply, it is

difficult to think that with men of scrupulous honour the practice was held quite unexceptionable.

There is the question of motive also. Apart from the opening phrase there is practically nothing in the epistle to connect it with Peter. An author trying to shelter under the ægis of Peter would surely have given us either personal reminiscences of Jesus or suggestions of the life or characteristics of Peter himself that would have assisted in the identification. It is true the writer claims to be a "witness of the sufferings of Christ" (v. 1). The most natural meaning of this sentence would be that he had been an eye-witness of the closing scenes in the life of Jesus; but the interpretation is not beyond doubt. The word "martys" does not necessarily mean "eye-witness." In Acts xxii. 20 Stephen is called a "martys" of Jesus, and in Rev. i. 5 Jesus is Himself called "the faithful martys." In any case, so far as our knowledge of Jesus or of Peter is concerned, there is nothing in the epistle that could not have been written by any great Christian teacher with the necessary spiritual insight and power.

It may be urged that that very fact is inconsistent with Petrine authorship; but the absence of explicit reference to the life and ministry of Jesus in this letter is a fact of the same kind as, even if more surprising in degree than, the comparative absence of such references in the letters of Paul, to whom many of the facts must have

been well known, and indeed in the New Testament as a whole outside of the Gospels. However that may be, it is not quite easy to see why an author, after the death of Peter, wishing to pose as Peter, did not try to give more verisimilitude to his claim ; nor indeed why one who had no new truth of any kind to proclaim should have tried to add weight to his communication by arrogating to himself the name of Peter. The epistle is a word of encouragement to disheartened men, sent by a teacher who had penetrated deeply into the meaning and power of the Gospel—a message whose " validity " depended on the character and insight of the author, not on his name. If the author was not Peter, there is no obvious reason why he should have claimed to be.

If the author calls himself Peter, and there is no apparent motive for a later writer trying to conceal his identity by using Peter's name, why have some hesitated to accept the letter as a genuine composition of Peter ? For one thing, the Greek style is much better than we should have expected Peter to have at command ; though we have to confess that our knowledge of the quality of Peter's written Greek (assuming that he could write Greek) is only guesswork. This difficulty however is largely or wholly removed by the intimation (v. 12) that the " brief letter " is being written " through Silvanus " (presumably the Silas or Silvanus of Acts and the Pauline epistles). We do not know how much is covered by this phrase " through Silvanus " ; it

may well mean much more than that Silvanus was the bearer of the letter or even the writer's amanuensis. If Silvanus, the friend and companion of Paul, was in some sense joint author of the epistle and responsible for its form, this would help to explain the flavour of Paulinism in the letter. Such a division of the responsibility of authorship between the matter and the form is not unknown in our own day.

Difficulty has also been found in discovering a period during the lifetime of Peter in which the Churches of Asia Minor, and indeed of the world, were subject to such persecution as is implied in this letter. According to a tradition which goes back at least to Tertullian, and possibly receives some support from Clement of Rome (" ad Corinthios " v. 2–4), writing before the end of the first century, Peter was crucified under Nero, presumably in the year 64. The claim is made that Nero's persecution of the Christians in 64 was the first outbreak that could correspond to the treatment of the Christians described in this epistle, and the inference is then drawn that Peter could not be the author. This however is a very large inference. The letter says nothing of Christians having suffered martyrdom ; and with the book of Acts before us and the persecution passages of Paul's epistles, to say nothing of our knowledge of the enmity aroused in many parts of the world to-day by the mere profession of Christianity, it seems unsafe to

fix any year as the earliest date at which the persecutions of the epistle might have occurred.

The absence of any reference to the controversy over the position of the Law in the Gentile Churches might possibly imply that this dispute had long since been settled. The letter however is a brief word of exhortation, not an encyclopædia of information on the religious situation of the time. In all such inquiries the fact must never be overlooked that the author was not writing primarily to illuminate the position for students of Introduction many centuries later. On the whole it is open to us to believe that Peter was the inspirer if not the actual author of the letter.

"Hebrews," "James" and "1 Peter" have all this in common, that they were written by Christian teachers, the first and third at least by men of unusual spiritual discernment; possibly also that they were written in the same generation. They have however other links of connection. There are various phrases and ideas in 1 Peter which suggest that it emanated from the same religious atmosphere, not necessarily from the same geographical area, as "Hebrews." The object of the sufferings of the Christ was "that He might bring you to God" (iii. 18), which reminds us of the refrain of "Hebrews": "Let us draw near to God." Jesus is at the right hand of God, and the angels are subject to Him in 1 Peter (iii. 22) as in "Hebrews." Jesus is "the shepherd . . . of

your souls " (ii. 23) and " the chief shepherd " (v. 4), as in the prayer at the end of " Hebrews " He is " the great shepherd of the sheep " (xiii. 20).

The almost complete absence of reference to Church officials and Church organisation is common to the two epistles ; though Peter speaks of presbyters, and is himself a presbyter (v. 1), and he almost goes out of his way to refer to baptism (iii. 21f.). His treatment of baptism is an excellent illustration of the " impressionist " method of Scriptural study of the time. He finds in Noah's flood a type of baptism, because in the ark Noah and his little company were saved " through water " (that is, presumably, " by passing through the water ") ; which seems a straining of the figure, since they were really saved *from* the water. When he comes to apply the idea to the " antitype," as he calls baptism, it is to the cleansing, not the saving power of water he looks ; and the spiritual efficacy of baptism he actually finds in the prayer for a good conscience that accompanies it.

Just before this (iii. 19) occurs the much disputed passage about the spirits in prison. As is now well known, Rendel Harris has suggested that after the Greek words " enōkai " at the beginning of the verse, the word " Enoch " has dropped out ; a type of accident which frequently happened in copying manuscripts, where the same or similar letters were repeated. The reference would then be to the story of Enoch's preaching to the fallen

angels, as a punishment for whose sins the flood was sent. The story is told in the book of Enoch to which reference is also made in the epistle of Jude.

This brilliant emendation has been accepted by Moffatt, Goodspeed and Martin ; it has however been rejected by Peake, Kennedy and Windisch. The suggestion has in fact proved to be almost as tantalising as it is attractive. We know that there was this story of Enoch preaching to the imprisoned spirits ; we do not know that there was at this time any such story about Jesus. The spirits moreover to whom the author refers were precisely those to whom Noah preached. That pre-Christian preaching might be called " evangelising " we learn from " Hebrews " (iv. 2), where the same Greek word is used as is used in 1 Peter iv. 6. We may grant that the reference to Enoch is introduced somewhat unexpectedly ; also that from a very early time the Christian imagination must have been exercised over the question : Where was the spirit of Jesus between His death and His resurrection ?

The men of the flood generation typified the Kingdom of Satan that stood over against the kingdom of God, and the judgment that they met formed the strongest possible contrast to the redeeming love of God as exhibited in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The story of Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison was a natural

answer to questions that would arise.[1] Still we do not know that at the time this epistle was written the suggestion had taken shape ; and on the whole the attractions of the emendation seem greatly to outweigh the difficulties it involves.

Again, the parallels between 1 Peter and James seem too frequent and too close to be the result of accident. The exhortation to rejoice when exposed to trials, which is common to both (James i. 2, 3 ; 1 Peter i. 6, 7), might be in both cases a reminiscence of the Sermon on the Mount ; and the phrase used by both in the same connection —" what is genuine in your faith "—may be due to the influence of Old Testament passages : the collocation is at least striking. In " James " Christians are begotten of God by the word of truth (i. 18) ; in " 1 Peter " they are born again of incorruptible seed through the word of God (i. 23). Both quote the verse of Proverbs : God resists the haughty and gives grace to the humble (James iv. 6 ; 1 Peter v. 5). In both men are called on to submit to God and to resist the devil (James iv. 7 ; 1 Peter v. 6, 9). Both quote the same phrase of Proverbs about covering a multitude of sins (James v. 20 ; 1 Peter iv. 8). Apparently one writer borrowed from the other or both were indebted to a common source.[2]

There is however the vital distinction between these two epistles, that whereas it is at least arguable

[1] See Windisch *ad loc.*

[2] See Biggs, *Introduction.*

that " James," as it left its author's hands, was not a Christian epistle at all, " 1 Peter " is Christian through and through. From the very first sentence the writer will not let his readers forget that he is a Christian teacher writing to Christians, to men who in the eternal purpose of God have been chosen not only to obey Jesus Christ but also to be sprinkled with His blood ; a metaphor which, however distasteful it may be to the susceptibilities of our age, evidently exercised a strange power in that age, over men who were as near God as we are, and had as much insight into His will.

In the tradition followed by " Matthew " Jesus had said to Peter : " Thou art Peter (the rock man), and on this rock I will build my Church." When Paul would picture the Church as God's temple, he felt that Jesus Himself was the rock, the foundation beside which there could be no other (1 Cor. iii. 11). In 1 Peter too, Jesus is the chief stone, the corner stone, of the new edifice, the spiritual house of God (ii. 4ff.). In the " Matthew " tradition a few verses later Jesus calls Peter a " scandal," a stumbling-block (xvi. 23). In 1 Peter it is Jesus Himself who is not only the rock but the " scandal," the rock over which all men stumble who will have none of Him (ii. 8). (We gather that the early Christians were fond of gathering Old Testament passages that used the " rock " or the " stone " metaphor, and of applying them to Jesus.)

The "house" or "temple" image had this advantage over the "field" metaphor which Paul discards for it (in 1 Cor. iii), that it left a place for Jesus as the foundation. It had the disadvantage that whereas a field represents life, stone is cold and "dead." So Peter, using one of his favourite words, defies the grammarians' rules for the use of metaphors, and calls Jesus the "*living* stone" (ii. 4), with whom for a foundation Christians as "living stones" are to form the temple of God, of which the edifice on Zion was but a shadowy type (ii. 5).

It may be that the unity of the letter is broken at iv. 12. The previous section ends with a benediction, as if it were the conclusion of the letter. What follows begins with an exhortation to men perplexed by undeserved suffering, and has no reference to the discussion of the same subject in the earlier part of the epistle.

## CHAPTER XIX

## THE CHRISTIAN REVOLUTION

This beautiful epistle comes to us like a breath from the hills of God. The writer "to the Hebrews" tells us of another and a better world, the world of unseen realities; this author seems to lift us right into it. As we read the glowing words of the inspired writer, words that help us to know something of what inspiration means, they seem to throb with the new power that comes of a new vision.

Peter believes, with so many other of the New Testament writers, that "the end of all things is at hand" (iv. 7); consequently the daring ideal "the world for Christ" hardly falls within the range of his speculation. All the more striking is his thought of the Christian rising clear above the life that seeks to entangle him. In his way of looking at things, Christians are aliens here (i. 1; ii. 11), dwelling for a time in a world that is not our true home (i. 17); yet the Christian, making this pilgrimage through a foreign land, is living in a world where neither men nor powers of evil have

power to hurt him, save by his consent. The one thing they fear is sin ; their one dread, not that they may suffer but that they may suffer deservedly (iv. 15). The writer of this letter is thrilling with the joy of a new discovery. He and the men to whom he writes did not yet date their correspondence from the birth of Christ ; but for them, even more really than for us, the coming of the Christ was the beginning a new creation. " The old has passed ; behold ! the NEW has come " (2 Cor. v. 17).

With the coming of Jesus, life has been lit up with a new meaning ; rather, for the Gentiles at least, life now for the first time has a meaning. What they had called life hitherto was an empty round of traditional custom (i. 18). It was "empty" only in so far as permanent worth was concerned ; it was full enough of other things, things which in the true New Testament style the author calls by their proper names (i. 14 ; ii. 1 ; iv. 3). Peter no doubt knew the people to whom he was writing, and was not maligning their pre-Christian record. No one will say that the morals of heathenism in Asia Minor in the first Christian century are typical of the morals of the whole non-Christian world ; yet in Christianity, as in no other religion, the " holy " man is the good man, and Peter is as convinced as the writer " to the Hebrews " that a life lived apart from " the living God " revealed in Jesus Christ is a tale without a meaning.

Facile conceptions of salvation find no more

support in this epistle than in any other part of the New Testament. The Christian is called to a strenuous life which, apart from the grace of God, would be as far beyond his conception as beyond his achievement. The devil who went about like a roaring lion looking for victims (v. 8) was a devil that took very human forms, the forms of cruel persecutors. What made them terrible was not their power to inflict pain but their power to make Christians turn traitor. Thus Peter urges his readers to be stout in the faith, to practise self-restraint, constant wakefulness as of an army sentry at a key post (v. 8, 9).

There is the struggle too, against the enemy within. The habits of centuries do not lose their power all in a moment at the preaching of the Gospel ; but in the Christian, whatever the cost, they must be broken. The fulfilment of heathen ideals was not so reprehensible in the old days when they knew no better, before they came to know God in Jesus ; they have now to turn their backs on their old life (iv. 3). Their non-Christian neighbours will be unable to understand why the old pleasures no longer have any attraction for them, and will tell them in vigorous language what they think of them (iv. 4). They are now priests, priests of a religion in which character is the one qualification for priesthood—royal priests because He whom they serve is a king, called on daily to offer to God the sacrifice of a blameless life (ii. 5, 9).

To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus ; a follower most of all in this, that when the world did its spiteful worst against Him, He met it with none of its own weapons. He let the world do its worst, knowing that from its wounds a healing stream would flow (ii. 21ff.). Men whose model is One whose only crime is that His innocence and graciousness are a perpetual rebuke to all that is petty and foul, whose power lies in His uncomplaining submission to the violence which is the world's answer to a godlike life, have said good-bye to wickedness ; it is in goodness they must find their life (ii. 24).

All the more must they keep their garments clean, because they are surrounded by unsympathetic and sceptical neighbours who cannot understand the change that has come over them, and who are only too ready to think the worst (ii. 15). The world is never very tolerant to those who are dissatisfied with the prevalent standards and try to rise above them ; but in communities such as Peter has in view, where even religion meant Oriental idolatry with all that that implies, Christians would be peculiarly liable to the charge of being unsociable, " enemies of the human race " ; and the characteristic features alike of their worship and their life, unintelligible as they would often be to their neighbours, would be judged with little regard for charity.

Peter is as conscious as the apostle Paul of the

dangers that lie in Christian "freedom." The Christian is delivered from bondage to custom and tradition, bondage to a law that seeks to meet with its appropriate prescription the varied dilemmas of our moral lives; he is not delivered from the eternal laws of right and wrong. The yoke of Jesus is light because we bow our necks voluntarily, and because it is the yoke of Jesus; it is a yoke all the same. We are delivered from Law or from laws only to become slaves of God (ii. 16).

Other men may try to be good; the Christian is an enthusiast for goodness (iii. 13); it is his one enthusiasm. For the Christian revolution is different fundamentally from the movements the world knows by that name; it is a revolution primarily in his own ambitions, motives, and conduct. The Baptist had come and said: "The change our people needs is not in its government but in its own life." Jesus had steadfastly resisted all temptations to be drawn into the political movement against Rome; He had paid the penalty with His life. Christianity came before the world in the first place as a religion that maintained that the transformations the world most needs are those which we ourselves by the grace of God can effect. Its kingdom is not of this world.

We read unmoved the words in which Peter counsels submission to every human authority (ii. 13). We need not suppose the advice was easy to give or altogether palatable for the readers.

Men who had originality enough to accept the Gospel of Jesus would often be the most critical of human institutions and the most resentful against official authority, at least against its unjust employment. The Gospel tradition hints not obscurely at the struggle through which Jesus passed to His decision that His way did not lie through a contest with the Roman power.

Yet however much the natural man might rebel against foreign usurpation, official tyranny, and all forms of bondage, Peter is as convinced as Paul that the Christian revolution differs from the world's revolutions as much in its methods as in its aims (Rom. xiii. 1ff. ; 1 Cor. vii.). The Christian is to be a loyal and peaceful citizen (ii. 13f.). Far from the Christian slave seeking his freedom, he is to bear patiently whatever wrong and insults his master may put upon him (ii. 18–20). The author does not even raise the question which Paul discusses, whether the Christian wife of a "heathen" husband may leave him. It is her place to accept whatever treatment her husband may mete out to her (iii. 1).

In spite of the sharp distinction that was drawn, or rather which drew itself, between Christians and "outsiders," there is the fine thought that *all* men are worthy of respect and therefore are to be respected ; for the "brotherhood" the Christian will have the warmer feeling of affection. The emperor too is to be respected, for he too is a man,

but in the mind of the Christian he must not usurp the place of God ; only God is to be reverenced (ii. 17).

In his counsel of "submission" Peter was no doubt influenced, as Paul was when he gave similar advice, by the consideration that a general rebellion of Christians against the political and social "status quo" would divert the religion of Jesus on to a wrong track. Like Paul also, he believed the end of all things was at hand, and therefore saw all projects of "reform" in what he believed to be their relative insignificance. But it seems to have been neither of these considerations that chiefly moved Peter to the advice he gave.

Political inoffensiveness is urged "for the sake of the Lord" (ii. 13). Servants are invited to a policy of patient non-resistance "because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in His footsteps" (ii. 21). If the downtrodden wife is not to fight for her rights, the reason is not that she has no rights but that there are far higher interests at stake. If she will meet her oppressor as her Master met His oppressors, her life will be an unspoken sermon that may "win" her husband (iii. 1f. ; 1 Cor. vii. 16). In Christian marriage, the husband is to treat his wife with intelligent thoughtfulness, rendering her the chivalrous honour due from the stronger to the weaker, and remembering that in the kingdom of God there are no distinctions of

sex ; the truth which so large a section of the non-Christian world has so strenuously denied (iii. 7).

In Peter's treatment of the whole subject there is no suggestion of that anæmic submissiveness which has sometimes been supposed to characterise the Christian ideal. If the author was the Peter we know, or anyone with the spirit of Peter, we can readily conceive that he did not reach the position he takes up here without many a struggle with the Old Adam. He has come to see that the way of the cross is the way of victory : of victory not for oneself—that is a minor consideration—but of victory for God ; is the only way to " win " to the new way of life those who would struggle to the death against all other kinds of resistance to the wrongs they are inflicting. Christianity is no match for the world when it fights with the world's weapons ; in the strength of the cross it is irresistible.

Peter counsels the way of the cross, in part because the new life that Jesus has opened up to him has lifted him into a realm where all our petty questions of " rights " and " wrongs " are irrelevant. The Christian citizen, however much he might be oppressed by earthly potentates, might possess his soul in patience ; he was a citizen of another kingdom where the wrath of the emperor and his satellites could not touch him ; not only a citizen but a priest, a royal priest. The Christian slave could forget his wrongs and insults in this joy that

he was Christ's freedman and God's slave (ii. 16). The meekness of the Christian wife is no cowardice ; if she is a true daughter of Sarah she will show fearless courage (iii. 6), and every Christian woman may wear that most graceful of all attire, the quiet and gentle yet brave spirit that God loves (iii. 3ff.).

The writer does not merely touch on the Christian attitude to undeserved suffering ; it is central in the epistle. Almost as much as the epistle " to the Hebrews," it is written to put new heart into men and women who are discouraged by the experiences through which they are passing. It would not be quite correct to say that in the drama of " Job " the Old Testament reaches its highest degree of insight into the perennial question of the meaning of unmerited suffering ; for that we have to turn to the " Servant " passages in " Isaiah." But " Job " is at least the most elaborate and challenging study of the problem in the Old Testament.

Yet the question with which 1 Peter deals is a far more difficult question than that with which Job wrestled. What roused Job to almost blasphemous criticism of God's ways with men was that he should be tormented as he was *in spite of* his goodness ; the New Testament problem is why men should be tortured as they are *because of* their goodness. The book of " Job " leaves us wondering whether there is any solution, or at least whether the author has found it. 1 Peter

leaves us wondering whether there is any problem, at least for one who has caught anything of the spirit of Jesus. The New Testament is largely a story of suffering for righteousness' sake, for fidelity to God and truth ; yet all through 1 Peter, as all through the New Testament, runs the note of victorious confidence, the feeling that there is nothing to explain, except to " babes " who imperfectly apprehend the meaning of the faith (ii. 2).

The " trials " that the readers are called on to face are only an insignificant preliminary to the " inheritance " which God is keeping for them and for which God is keeping them (i. 4–6). These trials test their faith ; if they stand the test, they will one day hear the " Well done, good and faithful servant " (i. 7). There is nothing to be surprised at even in " fiery trials " ; they are part of a normal Christian experience (iv. 12). One explanation of the sufferings of Christians is that there is a spirit in the world hostile to the Christian and all that he stands for ; the follower of Jesus cannot hope to escape unscathed, but he can at least learn to " pay the same tax of suffering " as his Christian brothers are paying in every part of the world (v. 8, 9).

Above all, they who suffer for their Christian profession have a fellowship in the sufferings of the Christ (iv. 13). The glorious spirit of God rests on them (iv. 14). The Christ had suffered,

not only through no fault of His own, not only in spite of His loyalty to God, but as a direct consequence of that loyalty. God had raised Him from the dead ; He lived in the hearts of Christians. In the experience of Peter, in the experience of multitudes of followers of Jesus like himself all over the world, they were finding the solution of the problem of pain, of suffering for righteousness' sake. By Jesus' stripes they were being healed. He had died, the just for the unjust ; and because the Just had died, the " unjust " for the first time knew what it was to live (ii. 21–25 ; iii. 18).

Like the writer " to the Hebrews " Peter has no theory of the Atonement. He evidently has in mind Isaiah liii. ; he uses the ransom metaphor which Paul also uses, and more than once he employs the language of sacrifice (i. 2, 19). His theology, undeveloped as it is, has power, because it is his attempt to explain the strange thing that has happened to him and to multitudes of others. They have been ushered into the presence of a wondrous blaze of light, that has made all their past life seem like darkness (ii. 9) The new life which is theirs has made all their past career seem like death. Men who had nothing to look forward to have been inspired with hope ; hope not in the world's sense but in the Christian sense, the assurance that the future is not hidden and fearful, but is lit with God's redeeming love (i. 3, 21 ; ii. 4, 5). " The hope that is in you " (iii. 15) so distinguishes

the Christian, is so unintelligible to his neighbours, that it can fitly designate the new faith.

All this Peter and those to whom he writes know that they owe to Jesus. He does not speak of God's love to men or man's love to God ; but it is to him we owe the striking phrase " whom though you have not seen Him you love " (i. 8) ; a way of speaking of Jesus that makes us chary of accepting theories that make Him a spectral figure that fitted into the " salvation " schemes of the " mystery " religions. The Jesus Christ of Peter and his friends was one who had been flesh and blood, who was clothed with attributes, who could call forth the deepest emotion. Although they did not see Him with the bodily eye, they trusted Him (i. 8).

What had moved them chiefly in the story of Jesus was His death, not only the fact of it but the manner of it. He who had helped multitudes and wronged none had gone to His death uncomplainingly, choosing to let His enemies do their worst in the belief, a belief that the history of Christendom has abundantly justified, that His death would move men and remake men as His life had not done (ii. 21ff.). In the crucifixion of Jesus we have in its acutest form the problem of unmerited suffering ; and His followers speedily learned that the cross of Jesus did not mean that we are living in a world where anything may happen, where wickedness may run amuck with

impunity and the evil is as likely to prosper as the good.

Jesus had appeared in the flesh but a generation or two before, but the cross of Christ represented the mind of God from all eternity ; the answer to all our questionings was found when God raised Him from the dead, " and gave Him glory " (i. 20, 21). Peter never asks what the rising from the dead meant. He knew what it meant to him and to the Christian fellowship : that through the risen Christ they had been raised to a new plane of existence, a new level of potentiality. The epistle throbs with gratitude to God (i. 3ff. ; ii. 9f.), and to Jesus (i. 8f. ; ii. 25 ; iii. 18).

While this sense of being new men living in a new world permeates the letter, there is in it also a deeper feeling. The author shares with the writer " to the Hebrews " the power of realising the unseen realities, of piercing through the shadow to the substance. But there is in the letter too an undertone of almost trembling expectancy, the Christian certainty that the story of God's dealings with His children is not yet fully told, that what the future hides from us is but a fuller proof of God's love. In the words of a quotation of Paul from an undiscovered source : " What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and has not entered into the heart of man, all that God has made ready for those that love Him " (1 Cor. ii. 9). Through the new life that is in them, they have become heirs

of an inheritance that cannot know destruction or corruption or decay (i. 4). As they gradually enter into that deliverance of soul that is the consummation of their loyalty to Jesus, well may they exult with joy unutterable and exalted (i. 8, 9).

One of the author's favourite words is "Revelation" in its different forms. Jesus Christ has already been "made manifest" (i. 20), but the world has as yet only begun to know Him. As under the spell of His cross we tear from our eyes the veil of selfishness and impurity that hides Him from us, as each new race that comes to worship Him finds in Him some new beauty, gradually His true glory will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. Twice the author speaks of "the apocalypse, the revelation of Jesus Christ" (i. 7 ; i. 13), once of the "apocalypse of His glory" (iv. 13). One day we shall see Him as He is, and all who have been faithful to their trust shall enter into the joy of their Lord (i. 7 ; iv. 13). What He has done for us He has done "in the spirit of the eternal." The life that is in us is the life that knows no corruption, for its source is the word of God that abides for ever (i. 23–25). When the chief shepherd is seen at last with face unveiled, His faithful pastors will receive the wreath of the victor's glory (v. 4). The wreath that adorns the brow of the winner in an earthly contest is made of leaves which, as they fade, typify the fleeting

nature of the achievement and its glory ; the crown that God gives is a crown of life.

Some of these things we would to-day express in other language ; but, allowing for the difference in vocabulary that comes from lapse of time and change of thought-forms, the faith and hope of Peter have been throughout the ages and are to-day the faith and hope of the Church.

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